5. VAMANA PURANA

INTRODUCTION

Narada asks sage Pulastya about Vamana incarnation:

Vamana Purana is one of the eighteen Puranas written by sage Vyasa. It contains tales pertaining to Lord Vishnu in his Vamana (dwarf) incarnation. Sage Pulastya while giving answers to Narada's enquiry narrates the tale of Vamana Purana.

All the Puranas give glimpses of Indian civilization and culture and Vamana Purana is no exception. It also teaches the virtue of righteousness and religiousness. Vamana Purana not only contains the divine tales of Nara-Narayana and Goddess Durga but it also contains tales of famous devotees like Prahlada, the salvation of Gajendra (elephant) etc.

Sage Narada asks Pulastya- "O revered sage! Why did Sri Hari take the incarnation of Vamana? Why did Prahlada fight a battle with the deities despite being a devotee of Lord Vishnu? How did Sati, Daksha Prajapati's daughter become Mahadeva's consort in her next birth? I am eager to know the answers to all these questions."

Pulastya replied- "O Narada! Once, Sati requested Lord Shankar to make arrangements for a permanent abode. At that time, Lord Shankar had his abode at Mandar Mountain. Summer season was approaching and Sati quite rightly had apprehensions of living in the open. Lord

Shankar told her that as he was a recluse, he never felt a need of a permanent dwelling. Though Sati was not satisfied by his answers yet she kept quiet. This way, both of them continued to live there. The summer season had passed and now it was the turn of rainy season to arrive. Sati made the same request to Lord Shankar. This time, Lord Shankar told her that it was impossible for him to construct a house, as he had no wealth. He also told her that he had only a tiger skin as his clothing, the king cobra- his sacred thread, Padma and Pingal (snakes)- his ear-rings and Keval and Dhananjay as his armlets.

After hearing this, Sati became worried as to how she would pass the rainy season without a home. Lord Shankar then assured her that this problem would be easily solved if she lived above the clouds. This way, she would remain untouched by the showers. After this, both of them ascended towards the sky and started living above the clouds. From that day onwards, Lord Shankar came to be known as Jeebhootvahan (one whose vehicle is the cloud).

TALES OF LORD SHIVA

DAKSHA PERFORMS A GRAND YAGYA

Pulastya says- "This way, both Shiva and Sati lived above the clouds till the end of rainy season. When autumn season arrived, both decided on returning to Mandar Mountain. Daksha had organised a grand Yagya in which he had invited all the prominent deities and sages except his own son-in-law, Shankar and his daughter, Sati."

Narada was surprised as to why Maheshwar- the lord of all splendours was not invited by Daksha. He was also curious to know why Lord Shankar had become a Kapali (a mendicant). Pulastya told him that during the period of final annihilation, Lord Vishnu after waking up from his sleep found a divine entity, who possessed three eyes, who had a trident in his hands and who wore a Rudraksha garland around his neck. Lord Vishnu then created ego, which had its evil effects on both Brahma and Shankar. Lord Shiva in his arrogance asked Brahma, his identity and origin. Lord Brahma then arrogantly asked Shankar, his identity. This way, a dispute ensued that later on turned into a fight in which, Brahma defeated Shankar. Lord Shiva severed two of the five heads of Lord Brahma. But the second head fell and got stuck on Lord Shiva's left palm. Angrily, Lord Brahma created a terrific creature, which challenged Shankar and ridiculed him by saying that as he (Shankar) was a sinner, therefore, he would not dirty his hands by killing him.

Lord Shankar was ashamed of himself. He went to Badrikashrama and requested Lord Vishnu for some alms. Lord Vishnu asked Shankar to hit on his (Vishnu's) left arm. Shankar hit Vishnu's left arm with his trident and the impact resulted in the creation of three streams. The first stream went up in the sky and established itself as Akashganga. The second one was Mandakini, which was received by sage Atri. The third stream fell on the skull, which was stuck in Lord Shankar's left palm. This resulted in the manifestation of a divine child who was ferocious and well armed with bow and arrows. Shankar instructed him to kill that creature, which was created by Brahma.

A tremendous duel was fought between them, which was inconclusive for thousands of divine years.

ATTONMENT OF LORD SHANKAR

Lord Shiva had committed a grave sin of Brahmahatya. All his efforts of separating Brahma's skull from his left palm went in vain. In the meantime, an entity named Brahmahatya appeared before him and entered into his body.

Lord Shankar decided to go to Badrikashrama to atone for his sins. After reaching there, he became worried when he did not find Lord Vishnu. He went to take a bath in river Yamuna but as soon as he entered the river, the water dried up. He experienced this strange phenomenon at the Saraswati River as well. He then made pilgrimages to numerous sacred and holy places but still did not become free from Brahmahatya. Dejected, he ultimately went to Kurukshetra where he found Sri Narayana and requested him to free him (Shankar) from the sins of Brahmahatya. Lord Vishnu advised him to go on a pilgrimage to Varanasi where he would be liberated from his sins.

Following Vishnu's instructions, Lord Shankar went to Varanasi and visited all the sacred sites like Dashashwamedh temple, Lolarka temple and Keshav temple. While he was worshipping Keshav, he said- "Though I have become liberated from my sins, yet I fail to understand the reason why this skull still sticks in my hand." Keshav told him that his problems would be solved if he takes a bath in the lake, which was near the temple. Lord Shankar took a bath in that lake and ultimately the skull fell on the ground. The place where the skull had fallen later on became famous as Kapalmochan.

SATI GIVES UP HER LIFE

Sage Pulastya says- "O Narada! This way, Lord Shiva became famous as Kapali. This was the reason why Daksha did not invite him. In the meantime, Jaya, sage Gautam's daughter went to see Sati at Mandar Mountain. Seeing her alone, Sati asked about her two sisters, Jayanti and Aparajita. Jaya revealed to her that both of them had gone to their maternal-grandfather's (Daksha) Yagya. Jaya also told her that all the deities had been invited to the Yagya. When Sati heard this, she was grieved and angry with her father. In a fit of rage, she gave up her life. Seeing her lifeless body, Jaya started wailing. Lord Shiva arrived there and upon hearing Jaya's wails, asked her why Sati was lying on the ground. Jaya then narrated the whole story. Lord Shankar became so infuriated that it resulted in the creation of numerous Ganas among whom Veerbhadra was the most prominent one.

Lord Shiva accompanied by the Ganas went to the site where Daksha was performing the Yagya. A tremendous battle ensued between them and the deities and finally, the deities were overpowered and ran away from the site. Veerbhadra, finding the time opportune, entered the oblation site. When the deities saw him entering the oblation site, they returned and tried to prevent him from doing so. Again, an intense battle erupted between both the sides. The deities used all kinds of weapons but they could not control the onslaught of Veerbhadra and fled.

Veerbhadra then went near the sacrificial fire. The sages were terrified and ran towards Lord Vishnu who attacked Veerbhadra with arrows but it did not hurt him at all. Vishnu then attacked him with other divine weapons. But still, Veerbhadra succeeded in neutralising those weapons. Vishnu was enraged and attacked him with his Sudarshan chakra that Veerbhadra swallowed. This angered Lord Vishnu further. He lifted Veerbhadra and dashing him to the ground, pressed Veerbhadra's stomach as a result of which, the Sudarshan chakra came out from his mouth. But Lord Vishnu spared Veerbhadra's life. Veerbhadra then went to Lord Shiva and narrated his woeful tale of defeat. Lord Shiva instructed Veerbhadra to leave for a safer haven and himself went to the oblation site accompanied by Bhadrakali. The sages became scared on seeing his terrifying appearance.

THE DESTRUCTION OF DAKSHA'S YAGYA

Fearing Lord Shiva's wrath, Lord Vishnu went to Hrishikesh and remained aloof for quite some time. Shiva's anger generated so much heat that it was enough to melt the eight Vasus. As a result, a river named Sita started flowing from there. After being attacked by Lord Shiva, the deities fled from the scene.

Lord Shiva then opened his third eye and furiously looked at the flame burning in the Havan-kund. The next moment, the fire went off. Even Yagya was terrified and he took the aerial route in the guise of a deer. Lord Shiva chased him in the appearance of Kal (Lord of death) with a bow and arrow named Pashupat.

In the end, Kal (epithet of Shiva) was successful in killing the deer, which was Yagya in reality. After his death, Yagya's body was established among the stars. After narrating the tale of destruction of Daksha's Yagya, sage Pulastya then goes on to tell Narada that the names of the zodiacs had been given just according to their appearances for e.g. Aries (Mesh) appeared like a ram. Similarly, Taurus (Vrishabh) appeared like an ox and so on.

TALES OF DEMONS

ANDHAK- THE DEMON KING

Sage Narada was curious to know how the demon King Andhak behaved with the deities. He asked Pulastya in this regard. Pulastya replied- "After ascending the throne, Andhak did a severe penance to please Lord Shiva and received a boon according to which he could neither be killed by the deities nor by any mortal. He also received another boon according to which even fire could not burn him.

Andhak appointed Shukracharya as his chief priest. He defeated the deities and had gained control over the whole earth. Once, Andhak had gone to see the beautiful sight of Sumeru Mountain. Indra after making adequate arrangements for the security of his capital Amravati came forward to fight him with a huge army. A fierce battle was fought between both the armies. The whole atmosphere was covered in darkness due to the dust. It became difficult for the warriors of both the sides to distinguish between friend and an enemy. The whole battlefield was strewn with dead bodies and blood.

Indra unleashed a volley of arrows towards Andhak. In reply, Andhak too retaliated by unleashing a volley of arrows towards Indra. In this duel, both of them got injured. Infuriated, Indra attacked him with his Vajra, which destroyed all of Andhak's weapons. Indra's Vajra then chased Andhak who jumped down from his chariot to save his life. Andhak defended himself by attacking it with his fist. As a result, it fell on the ground. Indra then attacked Andhak by unleashing a volley of arrows in his direction. Andhak dodged the assault and ran towards him menacingly. He attacked Airavat the elephant and mount of Indra with such force that it became paralysed. Seeing his elephant in such a pitiable condition, Indra picked up his Vajra and ran inside the fort to save himself. Andhak then single-handedly destroyed Indra's whole army.

Yamaraj was fighting from the deities' side. He attacked Prahlada who was fighting from Andhak's side. It became impossible for Yamaraj to match Prahlada's valour and bravery. As a result, he was forced to flee from the battlefield. Inspite of having mighty warriors like Varuna and Agni in their ranks, the deities could not match the valour of the demon's army, which comprised of valiant and brave fighters like Virochan, Maya and Shambar. Ultimately, the deities were defeated in this battle. The victorious demon King Andhak returned to Patal loka with his army.

SUKESHI'S QUERIES

Sukeshi was the son of demon King Vidyutkeshi. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. Being pleased by his devotion, Lord Shiva had blessed him with invincibility and gifted him a city, which was situated in the sky. Sukeshi was a virtuous and just king.

Once, he had gone into the Magadh forest where he found numerous sages engrossed in meditation. After introducing himself to the sages, he expressed his desire to know about the path that led to benediction. He also wanted to know how a man could achieve respectability and contentment in his life. The sages told him that a man could achieve benediction only by following the path of Dharma. "A religious man achieves both respectability and contentment", said the sages. Sukeshi then asked them about the characteristics of Dharma. The sages revealed to him that the deities engage themselves in religious activities like Yagya, self-study, study of Vedas and worship of Lord Vishnu. So, all these activities are the Dharma of the deities. "The Dharma of the demons consists of negative qualities like jealousy etc. But they have profound knowledge in policy matters and have great devotion towards Shiva", said the sages. "The Siddha's Dharma is to engage himself in activities like practice of Yoga, study of Vedas, self-realisation and devotion to both Lord Vishnu and Shiva", said the sages. In this way, the sages enlightened Sukeshi on the Dharma of different sections of divine entities.

At last, Sukeshi requested the sages to tell something about the hell (Narak). The sages replied that altogether there were 21 hells. The name of the first hell is Raurav, which covers the area of 2000 Yojans. The second hell Maharaurav is twice the area of Raurav. Similarly, the names of the remaining hells are Tamistra, Andhatamistra, Kalchakra, Aprathisth, Ghatiyantra, AsipatRavana, Taptakumbh, Kootshalmali, Karpatra, Swabhojan, Sandansh, Lohapind, Kalmasikta, Ksharnadi, Krimibhojan, Vaitarninadi, Shonitpayabhojan, Kshuragradhar, Nishitachakra and Sanshoshan.

SINFUL DEEDS

Sukeshi asked the sages about the sinful deeds, which leads to hell. The sages replied- "People who condemn Veda, deities, Brahmins etc. go to hell. Those who don't believe in religious texts like Purana etc. or those who cause obstacles in the accomplishment of Yagya or those who prevent a charitable man from giving donation also go to hell.

People who torment others, who steal sandals etc. go to the hell named Kalmsikta. Disobedient children who don't obey their parents and elders go to the hell named Aprathisth. People who touch their elders with their feet go to Raurav Narak. A selfish person who nourishes himself during drought without caring about his relatives go to the hell named Swabhojan. A person who does not protect people who have taken his refuge goes to the hell named Yantrapeed. A man who misappropriates the deposited money of other people goes to Vrishchikashan Narak. The sinners who copulate on auspicious days or who have illicit relations with other women go to the hell named Shalmali.

This way, the sages told Sukeshi about various types of sinful deeds, which led sinners to different hells.

JAMBUDWEEP AND BHARATAVARSH

Sukeshi expressed his desire to the sages to know about Jambudweep. The sages replied- "Jambudweep is a very large island. It is subdivided into nine parts. Ilavritvarsh is situated in its central part while Bhadrashvavarsh is situated towards its eastern side. Some prominent places situated around it are- Hiranyakvarsh towards north-east, Kinnarvarsh towards south-east, Bharatavarsh towards south, Harivarsh towards south-west, Ketumalvarsh towards west, Ramyakvarsh towards north-west and Kuruvarsh towards north. All these nine Varshas are full of natural beauty. The inhabitants of all the eight Varshas except India are never troubled by old age or death. The inhabitants are also religious and virtuous by nature. They attain great accomplishment without making any real effort.

Bharatavarsh has nine sub-islands. All these islands are surrounded by oceans on all sides and it is difficult to go from one island to another. These sub-islands are Indradweep, Kaseruman, Tamravarna, Gabhastiman, Nagdweep, Karaha, Sinhal, Varun and Kumar. Kirat live towards east of Bharatavarsh while Yavan live towards the west. People living towards the south of Bharatavarsh are called Andhra and those living towards the north are called Turuyak. Bharatavarsh is mainly inhabited by people belonging to all the major four castes i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The seven prominent mountains situated within Bharatavarsh are Mahendra, Malay, Sahya, Shukti, Manriksh, Vindhya and Pariyatra though there are many more mountains.

The following rivers originate from Himalaya Mountain- Saraswati, Yamuna, Hiranvati, Sutlej, Chandrika, Neela, Vitasta, Airavati, Kuhu, Devika, Ushira, Dhataki, Rasa, Gomti, Gandki, Kaushiki, Sarayu etc. Similarly, many rivers originate from the other mountains.

DASHANG DHARMA

The sages say- "Dharma consists of ten properties such as non-violence, truth, charity, not stealing the property of others, forgiveness, self-restraint, cleanliness etc. Hence it is known as Dashang Dharma. These properties are obligatory for people belonging to all castes and creeds. A Brahmin's life is categorised into four ashramas- Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanprastha and Sanyas. A Brahmachari is supposed to acquire knowledge by living a celibate life. After completing his studies, the Brahmachari graduates to the life of a householder. He gets married and performs his duties towards his family. After this, he enters into Vanprastha ashrama where he is required to go to the forest after abandoning worldly pleasures. At last, he accepts Sanyas, which is total renunciation. He is supposed to pass the rest of his life doing meditation and penance."

THE RISE AND FALL OF SUKESHI'S KINGDOM

Pulastya says- "After being enlightened by the sages on various subjects, Sukeshi returned to his capital. He taught the demons all that he had learnt. As a result, all the demons became very virtuous. The newly attained virtuosity and religiousness made the demons invincible and powerful. Sukeshi's capital was situated in the sky. The whole city illumined brightly due to virtuosity attained by the demons. Its illumination even subdued the radiance of Surya (Sun). Now it became very difficult to determine when the Sun rose.

The deity Surya became worried at this development. He started pondering on how the demons became so powerful and contemplated over the means to destroy the demons. While Surya was meditating, the fact regarding the demons' power dawned on him. Surya became furious and angrily glanced at Sukeshi. The city started falling towards earth. Sukeshi became worried and started praying to Lord Shiva. Seeing his devotee, Sukeshi in trouble, Lord Shiva looked angrily at Surya as a result of which, he too started falling towards the earth. When the sages and hermits saw Surya falling down, they advised him to take refuge in Lord Vishnu. Surya curiously asked as to how could he take Vishnu's refuge as he had been punished by Lord Shiva. The sages then advised him to direct his descent to Varanasi. Surya accepted their advice and landed at Varanasi between two rivers- Varuna and Asi. He was feeling restless because of severe heat and so he decided to take a bath in the Asi River. After taking his bath, he started revolving around both the rivers. In the meantime, all the sages, demons, Apsaras went to Brahma loka and requested Lord Brahma to re-establish Surya in his original abode. Lord Brahma, accompanied by all the deities went to Lord Shiva and requested him to forgive Surya. Shiva was pleased at their humbleness and forgave Surya and re-established him on his chariot. He also gave a new name to Surya- Lolark. At last, Surya was re-established in the sky.

TALES OF NAR-NARAYAN

MANIFESTATION OF NAR-NARAYAN

Sage Pulastya says- "Dharma, the possessor of divine body and who manifested from the heart of Lord Brahma married Murti, the daughter of Daksha. Four sons were born to them- Hari, Krishna, Nara and Narayan. Hari and Krishna engaged themselves in the practice of Yoga while Nar and Narayan went to the Himalaya Mountain and started doing penance for the welfare of humans.

Indra became frightened by their arduous penance. He feared that he might lose his authority and power. He sent beautiful Apsaras to disturb their penance. He himself went to that site accompanied by Kamadev and Vasant (spring).

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PRAHLADA MEETS NAR-NARAYAN

Once Narayan saw all three of them coming and he treated all of them with respect. As he was aware of the reasons for their arrival, he decided

to give them a surprise. He made the figure of a beautiful woman on his thigh with a flower. The next moment, the figure transformed into a live woman, which surprised all of them.

For Kamadev, the beautiful woman resembled his wife Rati. He became so infatuated by her beauty that he forgot about the actual purpose of his visit. The same thing happened to Vasant and all the Apsaras. Everybody who had come with the desire of victory had actually become a victim.

Seeing all of them surprised and amazed, Narayan told them that the beautiful woman was created by him from his thigh. He also instructed them to take away that beautiful woman to heaven. Kamadev and Vasant were captivated by Narayan's power. They also became terrified. They went back to heaven accompanied by Urvashi and narrated the whole story to Indra. Even Indra was amazed. In a short time, the amazing deeds of Narayan spread in all the directions and the various lokas.

Once, Prahlada- the son of demon King Hiranyakashipu asked sage Chyavan about the most revered and sacred place of pilgrimage in the whole world. Sage Chyavan told him about Naimisharanya- the most sacred place of pilgrimage on the earth. Prahlada visited Naimisharanya accompanied by many other demons. After reaching there, all of them took bath in a river. While roaming about in the city, Prahlada saw the trunk of a tree pierced with numerous arrows. Not far from the tree, he saw two hermits doing penance. Two divine bows and a pair of quiver were lying by the side.

Prahlada was amazed as to why the hermits would require weapons. He revealed his thoughts to the hermits. Both the hermits replied that a person who works according to his capabilities, earns respect. Prahlada became angry at their reply. He asked them as to what were their capabilities. Actually, the hermits were none other than Nar and Narayan. Both of them told Prahlada that they were invincible and nobody could defeat them in battle. Prahlada's anger crossed all limits. A tremendous battle ensued between Prahlada and Nar-Narayan.

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PRAHLADA BLESSED BY NAR-NARAYAN

A ferocious battle was fought between Prahlada and Nar-Narayan in which all types of lethal weapons were used. The battle continued for

1000 divine years. Ultimately, Prahlada was defeated in this battle. He went to Vaikunth and asked Lord Vishnu as to why Nar-Narayan was invincible. Lord Vishnu revealed to them that Narayan was his own incarnation. He also told them that Narayan could be won only by devotion and not by power.

Prahlada decided to relinquish his throne and appointed Andhak as his successor. He went to Badrikashrama and made salutations to Narayan in reverence. Narayan was surprised at the sudden change in his behaviour. He asked Prahlada as to what the matter was. Prahlada then said- "Who can defeat you? You are none other than Lord Janardan. You are the one who has taken incarnation of Hrishikesh, Chakrapani and Hayagreev."

Narayan was pleased by his devotion. He told Narayan that though he was not able to defeat him in the battle but he was successful in doing so by his devotion. Narayan also blessed Prahlada. Prahlada then returned to his capital. Andhak expressed his desire to make Prahlada the king once again but it was turned down by him. Prahlada spent the rest of his life preaching on the virtues of religiousness and truthfulness.

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MANIFESTATION OF VEGETATION FROM THE DEITIES

Pulastya says- "Lotus flower manifested from Vishnu's navel in the month of Ashwin. Similarly, other vegetation also manifested from the

different organs of the deities- Kadamb tree from the palm of Kamadev, Dhatura tree from the heart of Lord Shiva, Khair tree from the middle portion of Brahma's body, Kataiya tree from Vishwakarma's body. Kundalata manifested from Parvati's palm, Sinduar tree from Ganesha's belly, Palash tree and Gular tree from the right and left armpits of Yamaraj. Similarly, Sarpat manifested from the body of Sheshnag, black and white Durva grass from the tail and back of Vasuki Nag, Harichandan tree manifested from the heart of a devotee.

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MAHISHASURA

During ancient times, there lived two demons- Rambh and Karambh who would torment people. As both were sonless, they decided to do severe

penance by keeping their bodies submerged in Panchmad River with a desire of having sons. Indra becoming fearful, took the guise of a crocodile and killed Karambh while he was doing penance in the river.

Rambh became so dejected by his brother's death that he decided to give up his life by severing his head and offering it in the sacrificial fire. As he was about to turn his thoughts into reality, Agni appeared before him and prevented him from doing so and said- "Killing oneself is a grave sin. Don't give up your life. I am willing to fulfil any of your wish."

Rambh was pleased and requested Agni to bless him with a mighty and powerful son. Agni blessed him by saying- "You will beget a son from a woman of your own choice. But destiny had something else in store for him.

Once, Rambh had gone to see Yaksha King Malvat. He was impressed by Malvat's prosperity and unlimited wealth. King Malvat possessed lot of animal wealth like goats, lambs, oxen, elephant, horses, cows etc. Ramabh saw a beautiful buffalo in the cowshed. He started caressing her body just to appreciate her beauty. The buffalo got aroused and forced Rambh to copulate with her and this resulted in the buffalo's pregnancy.

Rambh returned to Patal loka accompanied by the buffalo. But the other demons came to know about this unusual incident and as a result, Rambh was excommunicated from the demons' tribe. Both of them decided to return to Yaksha King Malvat's palace. In due course of time, the buffalo gave birth to a beautiful calf, which could change its appearance according to its wishes.

Once, seeing the buffalo alone, a bull tried to breach her modesty. The buffalo ran towards Rambh for her safety. Ramabh attacked the bull with a sword and injured it. In retaliation, the bull also dashed its horns against Rambh's chest, which proved to be fatal. Seeing the dead Rambh, the buffalo became engulfed in sorrow. She had no other option but to take refuge of the Yakshas who protected her life. In the meantime, the seriously injured bull fell into a divine lake and died. Amazingly, its body transformed into a demon.

The Yakshas decided to cremate Rambh's body. The buffalo too decided

to embrace death by jumping into the burning pyre. But as soon as the pyre was lit, a ferocious demon emerged from it with a sword. He drove away all the Yakshas and killed the buffalo but spared her calf. This ferocious demon later on became famous as Raktabeej. He had defeated all the deities including Indra, Rudra, Surya and Marut. But the calf, which became famous as Mahishasura was even mightier than Raktabeej. All the defeated demons had accepted him as their leader and he was crowned as their king. Mahishasura defeated all the deities and drove them out from heaven.

The defeated deities accompanied by Brahma went to Lord Vishnu and narrated their woes to him. Lord Shiva too was present there. Both of them became furious after hearing the atrocities committed by Mahishasura. Divine effulgence appeared from the mouth of all the angry deities. These effulgence got collected at a place resulting in the manifestation of Goddess Katyayani.

MAHISHASURA

During ancient times, there lived two demons- Rambh and Karambh who would torment people. As both were sonless, they decided to do severe penance by keeping their bodies submerged in Panchmad River with a desire of having sons. Indra becoming fearful, took the guise of a crocodile and killed Karambh while he was doing penance in the river.

Rambh became so dejected by his brother's death that he decided to give up his life by severing his head and offering it in the sacrificial fire. As he was about to turn his thoughts into reality, Agni appeared before him and prevented him from doing so and said- "Killing oneself is a grave sin. Don't give up your life. I am willing to fulfil any of your wish."

Rambh was pleased and requested Agni to bless him with a mighty and powerful son. Agni blessed him by saying- "You will beget a son from a woman of your own choice. But destiny had something else in store for him.

Once, Rambh had gone to see Yaksha King Malvat. He was impressed by Malvat's prosperity and unlimited wealth. King Malvat possessed lot of animal wealth like goats, lambs, oxen, elephant, horses, cows etc. Ramabh saw a beautiful buffalo in the cowshed. He started caressing her body just to appreciate her beauty. The buffalo got aroused and forced Rambh to copulate with her and this resulted in the buffalo's pregnancy.

Rambh returned to Patal loka accompanied by the buffalo. But the other demons came to know about this unusual incident and as a result, Rambh was excommunicated from the demons' tribe. Both of them decided to return to Yaksha King Malvat's palace. In due course of time, the buffalo gave birth to a beautiful calf, which could change its appearance according to its wishes.

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All the deities presented their weapons to her- Lord Shiva gave his trident, Lord Vishnu gave his chakra, Agni gave his Shakti etc. After acquiring all the weapons, Goddess Durga thundered loudly. The deities eulogised her after which she proceeded towards Vindhya Mountain

mounted on her lion. Vindhya Mountain had been cursed by sage Agastya as a result of which, its enormous size turned into a hill. The tale behind this curse is as follows- In the ancient times, Vindhya Mountain was so high that it became very difficult for the Sun to make its movement. The Sun went to sage Agastya and requested him to minimise the size of Vindhya Mountain. Sage Agastya went near the Vindhya Mountain and said- "I am going on a pilgrimage but you are coming in my way. Since I am an old man, it is impossible for me to climb your steep slopes. I request you to reduce your size and remain in the same position till I return from my pilgrimage otherwise you will have to face my wrath."

Vindhya Mountain accepted his request and turned into a hill. Sage Agastya then proceeded on his pilgrimage towards south but did not return according to his promise. He constructed a magnificent hermitage and asked Lopamudra, the daughter of Vidarbha King to stay there and himself returned to his hermitage. Vindhya Mountain remained in that position waiting for sage Agastya's arrival. This way, sage Agastya solved the problem of the Sun.

Goddess Durga chose this very mountain to launch her assault. All the deities, Siddhas, Nagas, Apsaras etc. were present with her.

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THE DEMONS- CHAND AND MUND

Once, the demon brothers, Chand and Mund were passing near the Vindhya Mountain when they saw Goddess Chandika there. Both these

demons were stunned by her divine beauty. They had never seen such a beautiful woman in their life. They went to Mahishasura and told him about her beauty.

Mahishasura proceeded with a huge army, which comprised of valiant commanders like Vidalnetra, Vishang, Vayakal, Agrayudh, Chikshur, Raktabeej etc. The army assembled at the foothills of Vindhya Mountain. There, Mahishasura instructed Dundubhi to go and bring Goddess Durga by any means.

Dundubhi went to Goddess Durga and boasted about Mahishasura's might and power by saying-"The mighty Mahishasura has defeated all the deities who ran out from heaven to save their lives. He is lord of all the three worlds and is invincible but this victorious and mighty king has been enslaved by your beauty. You must not miss this chance of marrying him."

Goddess Durga replied- "I am aware of Mahishasura's feats. I am most willing to marry him. But there is one problem. There is a tradition in our clan according to which an aspiring husband is required to give a Shulk (tax) in lieu of getting married." Dundubhi was happy thinking that it would not be difficult for Mahishasura to fulfil her demand. He said- "Mahishasura can even give up his life for your sake."

Hearing this, Goddess Durga laughed loudly and said- "O demon! According to the tradition of our clan, only such a person can marry a woman who defeats her in the battle." Dundubhi went back to Mahishasura and narrated the whole story. Mahishasura instructed Chikshur to go and bring Goddess Durga after enslaving her. Chikshur proceeded with a huge army. Seeing him coming in the direction of Goddess Durga, Lord Brahma instructed her to use an armour to protect herself. The Goddess refused by saying- "No demon can stand before me in a battle." All the deities then chanted Vishnupanjar Stotra for her safety. Protected by the Stotra, she was successful in killing many demons. Seeing his devastated army, Mahishasura himself came to fight her.

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KILLING OF MAHISHASURA

Narada asked sage Pulastya as to how Goddess Durga kill Mahishasura. Sage Pulastya replied-"After the killing of Chikshur, Mahishasura sent

Namar to fight Goddess Durga. Namar proceeded towards the Vindhya Mountain accompanied by a huge battalion. After reaching there, he shot a volley of arrows towards the Vindhya Mountain. As a result, the whole mountain was covered by innumerable arrows. This defiant act of Namar made Goddess Durga extremely furious. She attacked her enemies menacingly. She killed some of the demons by her sword, some with her mace and many more were killed by her arrows. Even her mount- Simha killed many demons. The demons were completely surprised by the ferociousness of the attack and fled from the battlefield.

Seeing his whole army fleeing from the battlefield, Namar came forward, mounted on an elephant to fight Goddess Durga. He unleashed his devastating weapon- Shakti towards her. At the same time, he also attacked her mount Simha (lion) by releasing many arrows towards it. But Goddess Durga destroyed all the weapons. In the meantime, the elephant held the Simha with its trunk but the Goddess's mount somehow released itself from the trap and attacked Namar. Namar fell from the elephant and died.

After Namar's death, Chikshur came to fight the Goddess but both his hands and legs were severed by her. Ultimately, Goddess Durga severed his head as a result of which, Chikshur died. The news of Chikshur's death spread like a wildfire. Many more valiant commanders of Mahishasura's army came forward to fight her but all of them were vanquished.

At last, Mahishasura came forward to fight Goddess Durga in the guise of a buffalo. Goddess Durga started playing her damru (small drum) and Veena, which resulted into the emergence of numerous ghosts. He attacked the ghosts with his horns, four legs and by violently lashing his tail. He then attacked Durga's mount Simha and his violent movements shook even the earth and the mountain. Goddess Durga grabbed his neck with the help of a noose. The next moment, Mahishasura transformed his appearance into an elephant. Goddess Durga then severed his trunk. Mahishasura again changed his guise into a buffalo. Goddess Durga attacked him by unleashing various weapons but the demon escaped unhurt.

Goddess Durga suddenly jumped down from her mount Simha and

climbed upon Mahishasura, who was in the guise of a buffalo. Mahishasura started jumping violently. Goddess Durga pressed Mahishasura's back with such force that he suffocated. She then severed his head. Suddenly, Mahishasura appeared in human form with a sword. Goddess Durga kicked him on his chest and again severed his head. The news of his death created havoc in his army and the demons fled from the battlefield and hid themselves in Patal loka.

The deities became pleased at Mahishasura's death and eulogised Goddess Durga. She became pleased and after assuring the deities of taking re-incamation for their welfare, disappeared from the scene.

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RE-INCARNATION OF GODDESS DURGA

Revealing the reasons for Goddess Durga's re-incarnation, sage Pulastya says- "Goddess Durga is also known as Kaushiki as she had manifested

from the cell (Koshika) of Uma's (Parvati's) body. After the manifestation, she went to Vindhya Mountain with the objective of killing the demons Shumbh and Nishumbh. She was accompanied by numerous Bhoot ganas (spirits).

After Sati's death, Rudra engaged himself in penance and became a celibate. He had even relinquished his responsibility of leading the deities' army. When Mahishasura came to know that the deities were bereft of their commander, he attacked them as a result of which, the deities were defeated. The deities went to Lord Vishnu who was at that time living at Shwetdweep. When they reached there, they were surprised to find that Lord Vishnu was aware of their defeat. Lord Vishnu then advised them by saying- "All of you must go to Mena- Manasputri of Agnishwat and request her to give consent to marry Himalaya. The same Mena would give birth to a beautiful girl who in reality would be the re-incamation of Sati. All of you must go to Kurukshetra and eulogise her on the night of Amavasya."

The deities were curious to know about the origin of Kurukshetra. Lord Vishnu told them-"During the initial phase of Satya Yuga, there was a mighty king named Riksh, who was the descendant of Soma. Samvaran was the son of Riksh. He succeeded his father at a young age. Samvaran was a great devotee of mine. Vashishtha- the son of Varuna was his chief priest and had taught him all the Vedas. One day, Samvaran went to the forest for hunting after entrusting his responsibilities to Vashishtha. After reaching the forest, he started wandering in search of his game. He saw a beautiful lake full of numerous lotus flowers. He also saw many Apsaras and other divine beauties enjoying themselves by singing and dancing. Samvaran was infatuated by the divine beauty of one of those Apsaras- Tapti, who was the most beautiful among them. Coincidentally, Tapti too saw Samvaran staring at her. She was so infatuated by Samvaran's handsomeness that she fell unconscious. She was carried by her companions back home.

After returning to his capital, Vashishtha was surprised to find change in Samvaran's behaviour. It seemed as if his mind was pre-occupied by something. By his Yogic power, Vashishtha came to know about the whole incident. He decided to take the help of Tapti's father- Surya. He went to Surya and requested him to marry Tapti with Samvaran. Surya

did not want to annoy his esteemed guest, so he gave his consent. Vashishtha then returned to his hermitage accompanied by Tapti and ultimately Tapti and Samvaran got married.

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THE TALES OF KING KURU AND KURUKSHETRA

In course of time, Tapti gave birth to a son, who possessed all the signs of royalty. After growing up, he mastered all the four Vedas and other scriptures within a very short period. At the raw age of 24, he became a scholar. When he attained marriageable age, he was married to Saudamini-the daughter of Sudama. Later on, he was appointed as the successor by his father, Samvaran.

After becoming the king, Kuru ruled his subjects in a just manner but very soon he got bored of his monotonous life. He knew that only those kings became immortal who accomplished amazing feats. He decided to do something for which people would remember him. With the objective of making his name immortal, he went to the most sacred place called Samantpanchak and decided to cultivate the eight virtues - Tapa, Satya, Kshama, Daya, Shauch, Dan, Yuga and Brahmacharya on its barren land. He started ploughing a piece of land with a golden plough, which was pulled by Lord Shankar's bull and Yamaraj's buffalo named Paundrak.

While he was busy ploughing the field, Indra approached him and asked suspiciously as to what he was trying to cultivate. When Kuru revealed his intentions, Indra made fun of him and went back. But Kuru was not worried and continued to cultivate the land. In a very short time, he had already cultivated the land measuring 7 kosas. One day, Lord Vishnu arrived and asked the same question, which Indra had asked. When Kuru revealed his intentions, Lord Vishnu was surprised and wondered as to from where he would get the seeds to grow these things. Kuru told him that all these eight virtues were present in his own body and it would not be a difficult task to cultivate these things. Lord Vishnu wanted to test his commitment and sincerity and said- "Give the seeds to me. I would sow the seeds while you should plough the field."

Kuru outstretched his right hand but Lord Vishnu cut it into thousands of pieces with his chakra. All the pieces were distributed among the deities but Kuru was unfazed and again stretched his left hand towards Lord Vishnu. But his left hand too met the same fate. In this way, the most generous and benevolent King Kuru offered all his organs to Lord Vishnu. But all the organs were severed by Lord Vishnu. At last, Kuru offered his head as he had nothing else to offer. Lord Vishnu was pleased by his

generosity and asked him to demand anything. Kuru replied- "All the area cultivated by me should become famous as a sacred pilgrimage. All the devotees who visit or die at this sacred pilgrimage must attain salvation. This place should be known by my name."

This is how the most sacred place of pilgrimage- Kurukshetra came into existence.

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BALI- THE DEMON KING

Lomaharshan told the sages- "Bali was the descendant of Virochan and the son of Hiranyakashipu. After his father's death, he defeated the

deities and drove them out from their abodes. Very soon, all the three worlds were under his control. He was a virtuous king and so were his subjects. During his reign, every corner in his kingdom would be abuzz with religious activities. As a result, the whole world became devoid of sin."

One day, Goddess Lakshmi arrived and said- "O brave king of the demons! I am pleased by your valiance with which you fought and vanquished the deities. This is the reason why I have come on my own will to bless you." After saying this, Goddess Lakshmi merged with his body. This way, Bali acquired all the splendours of the world.

The sages asked- "How were the deities able to defeat Bali and why did Lord Vishnu take the incarnation of Vamana?" Lomaharshan replied- "After being defeated by Bali, Indra went to Meru Mountain where his mother Aditi lived and narrated the woeful tale of the deities' defeat. Aditi took her husband's (Kashyapa's) advice in this regard. Kashyapa thought that only Lord Brahma could solve their problem. So, he went to Brahma loka accompanied by the deities.

When they reached there, they found numerous Brahmins engaged in religious activities. Lord Brahma too was sitting among them. Sage Kashyapa and all the deities made salutations to Lord Brahma and stood silently.

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DEITIES DO PENANCE AND LORD NARAYAN BLESSES KASYAP

Lord Brahma told the deities that he was aware of their plight. He was of the opinion that the mighty Bali could be defeated only by the Almighty

himself and nobody else. Lord Brahma said-"You must go to a place called Amrit, which is situated towards the north of Ksheersagar. The Almighty God is engaged in an austere penance at that place. All of you must go there and try to please him by doing penance and after he is pleased, just request him to take his next incarnation as Aditi's son."

Sage Kashyapa and all the deities agreed to follow Brahma's advice. All of them proceeded towards Shwetdweep. When they reached there, they were amazed to find the place devoid of any creature. Its boundary seemed limitless and even the Sun's rays could not reach it. Sage Kashyapa initiated all the deities into the austerity named Kamad, fulfiller of all the desires. After that, all of them commenced their severe penance.

Lord Narayan became pleased by Kashyapa's eulogies and austere penance. He appeared before the deities and asked them to demand anything they wished for. Kashyapa requested him to give Aditi, the privilege of becoming his mother. Lord Vishnu agreed to take birth as Aditi's son.

The deities became pleased and all of them proceeded back towards Kashyapa's hermitage. When they reached Kurukshetra, the place where Kashyapa had his hermitage, they inspired Aditi to commence her penance to please Lord Vishnu. Aditi did a severe penance for 10,000 years. The place where she did her penance later on became famous as Aditivan. Lord Vishnu was extremely pleased by her devotion.

Lomaharshan says- Lord Vishnu appeared and told her that he was most willing to fulfil her wish. Aditi requested him to make her son- Indra, the lord of all the three worlds once again. Lord Vishnu assured her that he would take birth as her son and kill all the demons.

Aditi had apprehensions as to how she could bear the weight of Almighty God in her womb. But Lord Vishnu assured her by saying- "Don't worry. I will give you the strength to do that. In course of time, Aditi became pregnant. But soon after her pregnancy, the earth shook violently because of the unbearable weight of the foetus. Wherever she went, that particular portion of earth tilted down because of the enormous weight. Her pregnancy had significantly eroded the radiance of the demons.

DEITIES DO PENANCE AND LORD NARAYAN BLESSES KASYAP

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BALI'S QUERIES TO PRAHLADA

Lomaharshan says- "When Bali saw the demons becoming devoid of radiance and power, he enquired about the reasons from his grandfather,

Prahlada. He wondered whether it was a bad omen. Prahlada went into a deep trance and saw the whole earth shaking violently. He also saw high tides rising in the ocean. He was convinced that these signs went to prove the inevitable emergence of the deities' power. Prahlada then meditated upon Lord Vishnu and found him manifesting in Aditi's womb as a Vamana (dwarf). He also saw the whole universe existing in his body. Prahlada was surprised but the next moment he controlled himself and told Bali- "Now I know the reason why the demons have become devoid of their radiance and power. Lord Hari is about to take incarnation as the son of Aditi and this is the reason why all the demons have become powerless."

Bali curiously asked Prahlada- "Who is this Hari, the tormentor of the demons? Why should we be scared of him as we have many valiant demons who could defeat him easily." Prahlada became furious at Bali's utterances and cursed him by saying- "How dare you say like this! I am ashamed that you have taken birth as my grandson. I curse you to lose your kingdom and fall from grace because you have criticised Lord Vishnu- the supreme saviour."

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MANIFESTATION OF LORD VAMANA

Bali felt sorry for hurting Prahlada's feelings. He said- "Dear grandfather! My intelligence has been overshadowed by my arrogant attitude. You

have done the right thing by cursing me. I am not scared of losing all my prosperity and splendour but your anger is unbearable for me."

Now even Prahlada realised that he had committed a mistake by cursing his own son. He said-"Unable to control my anger, I cursed you but now nothing can be done and my words will definitely come true. But don't worry as my blessings would help you to become a supreme devotee of Hari and you would be protected by him."

Lomaharshan says- "In course of time, Lord Vishnu took birth as Vamana. This incident of Vishnu's birth had liberated Aditi and all the deities from their sorrow. Lord Brahma appeared and performed Vamana's Jatkarm. He also eulogised Vamana and worshipped him. Lord Vishnu was pleased by his eulogy and revealed to him that he took the incarnation of Vamana to make Indra, the lord of all the three worlds."

Lord Brahma was pleased and presented a black coloured deer skin to him. Similarly, sages like Marichi, Vashishtha, Brihaspati, Angira, etc. presented Palash Danda, kamandalu, sacred thread and silken clothes respectively. Lord Vamana then proceeded towards the place where King Bali was performing his oblation. Lord Vamana was in the appearance of a hermit. Though he was of diminutive size, yet each of his steps were enough to shake the earth.

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LORD VAMANA'S DEMANDS

Lomaharshan says- "The shaking and trembling of earth surprised Bali and he enquired about this strange happening to Shukracharya. He was

also surprised by the fact that Agni was not accepting the offerings. Shukracharya, after contemplating for a while on this matter, came to know about Vamana's incarnation. He informed Bali that Vamana was on his way to the oblation site and his each step was causing turbulence on the earth.

Bali was pleased that he would get an opportunity to see the Almighty God whom the sages contemplate upon. He was proud of his good fortune that the lord was paying him a visit. Shukracharya aware of the reason for Vamana's arrival warned Bali against making any promise to him. Bali replied- "How can I refuse if the Almighty God demands anything from me? I am willing to face any hardship to safeguard my benevolent image. I don't mind if the deities get benefited by my actions. Even if the lord is coming with the intention of killing me, I am not scared as that is how I would attain salvation. Come what may, I am not going to abandon my charitable nature."

As the conversation between Shukracharya and Bali continued, suddenly, Lord Vamana arrived at the site. Vamana's radiance subdued the power of all demons present there. Lord Vamana being impressed by the grandeur of Vamana's Yagya complimented him for organising such a magnificent Yagya. Bali eulogised and worshipped his esteemed guest. He requested Vamana to reveal the reason of his arrival and promised that his wishes would be fulfilled. Lord Vamana smiled and told him that he needed a small piece of land measured by three steps for the performance of Yagya. Bali was surprised by this demand and requested him to ask for more land but Lord Vamana told him that he needed only that much land.

Bali agreed and took a vow to donate a piece of land measured by three steps. Hardly had Bali taken his vow, when suddenly Lord Vamana expanded his size. His first step covered the whole earth. By his two successive steps, he covered the two worlds. This way, Bali was forced to donate all the three worlds according to his vow. Lord Vishnu then made Indra, the king of all the three worlds and sent Bali to the nether world named Sutal. He blessed Bali by saying- "You would enjoy a long life till the end of this present Kalpa. You would hold the post of Indra till the arrival of Savami Manavantar. As long as you remain supportive of the Brahmins and the deities, you would enjoy all the pleasures of life. But if

you go against their wishes then you would be fastened by Varuna's noose."

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RIVER SARASWATI

The sages requested Lomaharshan to reveal about river Saraswati's origin, which flowed in Kurukshetra. Lomaharshan said- "Saraswati originates from Pakad tree (Indian fig tree). She enters Dwaitvan after passing through numerous mountains. While describing about her majesty, sage Markandeya felt that Saraswati was the source from, which everything originated- all the three worlds, three Vedas, Vidya (learning), heavenly bodies like Sun, Moon etc. Once, sage Markandeya eulogised Saraswati by saying- "O Saraswati! You manifest in the form of cryptic mantra- "OMKAR". You are the eternal form through which the Almighty God (Brahma) manifests himself in different appearances."

Saraswati was pleased by his devotion and said- "O Brahmin! I am willing to go wherever you want to take me." According to Markandeya, river Saraswati was initially known as Brahmasar. Later on, she became famous as Ramhalad. Sage Markandeya requested Saraswati to flow in the territory of Kurukshetra where sage Kuru was doing his penance. This way, Saraswati diverted her course towards Kurukshetra.

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KURUKSHETRA

The sages requested Lomaharshan to describe about the geographical condition of Kurukshetra. Lomaharshan replied- "There are 7 different

forest ranges in Kurukshetra. They are-"Kamyakvan, Aditivan, Vyasavan, Phalkivan, Suryavan, Madhuvan and Sheetvan. Nine rivers flow across Kurukshetra- Saraswati, Vaitami, Ashga, Mandakini Ganga, Madhustrava, Vasu, Kaushiki, Kaggar and Hiranyavati. Kurukshetra is believed to be the most sacred place of pilgrimage. A pilgrim visiting Kurukshetra should begin his pilgrimage only after worshipping the Yaksha. He should then pay a visit to the famous Aditivan where Aditi had accomplished a severe penance to get a son. By doing this, he is blessed with sons possessing all the good qualities. After that, he should pay a visit to a place called Savan where Lord Hari dwells. A devotee who pays a visit to Lord Vimaleshwar becomes liberated from all his sins and goes to Rudraloka after his death. Some other places of pilgrimage situated in Kurukshetra and which are considered to be very sacred are Paritlav, Kaushiki, Dharani, Daksha's hermitage, Shalukini, Sarpeedadhi, the temples at the bank of Panchnad river, Varaha temple, Someshwar temple etc."

"A devotee should also pay a visit to Ramakunda where Parashurama had constructed five ponds and filled them up with the blood of the Kshatriyas, whom he had killed. He had pacified the soul of his ancestors by performing Tarpan with the blood of the dead Kshatriyas. The dead ancestors were pleased with him and blessed him in becoming free from the sins, which he had acquired because of killing Kshatriyas."

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SAGE MANKANAK EULOGISES SHIVA

Sage Mankanak was the Manasputra of Kashyapa. He had seven sons, who were famously known as Marud Ganas. They are the one who hold

all the movable and immovable objects of this world.

Once, sage Mankanak injured his finger by the sharp edge of Kusha grass while he was trying to pluck them for his religious rites. But he was quite surprised when he found vegetative juice (Shak Rasa) oozing out from the wound instead of blood. He thought that perhaps his blood had transformed into vegetative juice by the virtue of his penance. This abnormal event made him arrogant and he started dancing in joy as a result of which the whole world started to swerve. Lord Brahma became puzzled by this sudden development. He went to Lord Shiva and requested him to stop Mankanak from dancing so that the universe became steady.

Lord Shiva went to sage Mankanak and said- "O supreme sage! Being a hermit, you are supposed to have control over your emotions. May I know the reason of your extreme joy, which makes you dance." Mankanak told him that his penance had given him great power due to which vegetative juice was oozing out from the wound instead of blood and this was the reason for his extreme joy and happiness. "That is why I am dancing", said Mankanak. But Lord Shiva was not amused and wanted to teach him a lesson. He hit the thumb with the nail of his finger as a result of which, ashes poured out from the wound. Mankanak was surprised by this. Being ashamed, he said- "I know, you are none other than Lord Shiva because nobody else can perform this amazing feat. I am your great devotee. You are the one on whom, deities like Brahma and Vishnu are dependent. I need your blessings so that the virtues of my penance remain intact." Lord Shiva blessed him and promised to dwell in his hermitage forever.

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SOME SACRED PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

AUSHANAS TIRTHA

Describing about the greatness of Aushanas, the most sacred place of pilgrimage, Lomaharshan narrates the following tale- "During Treta Yuga, Lord Rama had killed many demons while he was in exile. Once, while he was living in Dandak forest, he had severed the head of a wicked demon with his Kshura arrow. The severed head of the demon was carried by the arrow for quite a distance and coincidentally it got stuck on the thigh of sage Rahodar. It became very difficult for him to perform his religious duties. Bad smell emanating from the severed head was unbearable. Some sages advised him to pay a visit to Aushanas to become free from his problem.

Rahodar went to Aushanas and as soon as he touched the holy water of the river, the severed head got detached and fell in the river. Delighted, he went back to his hermitage. From that day, Aushanas also came to be known as Kapalmochan.

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VASHISHTHAPAVAH TIRTHA

The sages asked Lomaharshan about the origin of Vashishthapava Tirtha and about the reason why sage Vashishtha was carried along by the

powerful current of Saraswati river. Lomaharshan said- "There was great rivalry between sage Vashishtha and sage Vishwamitra. In course of time, it turned into a bitter enemity. Vashishtha had his hermitage at a place called Sthanu Tirtha and Vishwamitra's hermitage was situated just towards the west of it. Vishwamitra was jealous of Vashishtha's accomplishment."

Once, Vishwamitra asked river Saraswati to bring Vashishtha to his hermitage with the help of powerful currents so that he could kill him. River Saraswati became sad and refused to obey him, which made Vishwamitra angry. He again repeated his commands. Seeing no other option, she went to Vashishtha's hermitage and narrated the whole story to him. Vashishtha agreed to be carried away by her current.

When Vishwamitra saw Vashishtha, he furiously started looking for some weapon to kill him. Saraswati became scared and carried Vashishtha to safety as she did not want to acquire the sin of collaborating in the killing of a Brahmin. Vishwamitra angrily cursed her- "May your water be mixed with blood and may the demons thrive on your banks."

This way, Saraswati flowed with her water mixed with blood for one year. All the sages, deities, Gandharvas and Apsaras were worried at this happening. But, this was not the case with the demons, who lived happily at the bank of river Saraswati thriving on the blood mixed in her water. They used to live happily- dancing and rejoicing, as if they had won the heaven from the deities.

One day, some sages arrived at the bank of river Saraswati and became distressed after seeing her water mixed with blood. They asked her about the reason. She revealed the whole story and the misdeeds of Vishwamitra. The sages then requested river Aruna- the liberator of all sins to change her course and start flowing towards river Saraswati. As soon as river Aruna submerged into river Saraswati, she (Saraswati) regained her purity once again.

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KAMYAKVAN TIRTHA

The sages asked Lomaharshan about the origin of Kamyakvan Tirtha. Lomaharshan replied-"Once upon a time, the sages of Naimisharanya

came to Kurukshetra to take bath in river Saraswati. But, since they were large in number, the banks of river Saraswati could not accommodate all of them. In their helplessness, they created an imaginary place of pilgrimage named Yagyopavitik Tirtha and took an imaginary dip in it. But many of the remaining sages were unable to do even this."

When Saraswati saw such a large gathering of Brahmins, desirous of having bath in her holy waters, she created a garden (Kunj) and started flowing towards west. This very garden later on developed into a dense forest and became famous as Kamyakvan.

KAMYAKVAN TIRTHA

The sages asked Lomaharshan about the origin of Kamyakvan Tirtha. Lomaharshan replied- "Once upon a time, the sages of Naimisharanya came to Kurukshetra to take bath in river Saraswati. But, since they were large in number, the banks of river Saraswati could not accommodate all of them. In their helplessness, they created an imaginary place of pilgrimage named Yagyopavitik Tirtha and took an imaginary dip in it. But many of the remaining sages were unable to do even this."

When Saraswati saw such a large gathering of Brahmins, desirous of having bath in her holy waters, she created a garden (Kunj) and started flowing towards west. This very garden later on developed into a dense forest and became famous as Kamyakvan.

STHANU TIRTHA

The sages then asked Lomaharshan about the origin of Sthanu Tirtha and the importance of Sthanu Vata. They also expressed their desire to know

about the reservoir named Sanihitya and how Indra had filled it up with mud. Sage Lomaharshan replied- "Once, Sanatkumar upon being asked by Balkhilya and other sages the same question, narrated the following tale- During the period of final annihilation, when the whole earth was submerged in water, Lord Brahma manifested inside an egg. He slept there for thousands of yugas. When he woke up from his sleep, he found the world devoid of any inhabitants. Being under the influence of Rajo Guna, he planned to commence his creation. At the same time, Lord Vishnu awakened from his sleep and broke that egg after seeing that the whole world had merged inside him. Subsequently, Lord Brahma began his creation starting from the word- 'OMKAR'. After that, the terms- Bhur, Bhuvah and Swah respectively came into existence. The brilliant effulgence radiating from the egg had dried up the water as a result of which, the remaining water had turned into the shape of an embryo. The reservoir- Sanihitya is situated at the same place where the egg had manifested itself. Meru Mountain is nothing but the outer shell of that egg and all the other mountains are its membrane. The oceans and the rivers are the fluid inside that egg. There is a great reservoir near the navel area of Lord Brahma. A big Banyan tree is situated just in the middle of that reservoir. This tree appears like a pillar (Sthanu). All the three major castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya) originated from that tree. Lord Brahma then created his Manasputras- Sanat, Sanandan etc. Subsequently, he created the Saptarishis and the Balkhilyas. All the Balkhilyas did a severe penance for thousands of years without having a morsel of food. They had become very weak but still Lord Shiva was not pleased with them."

Once, Lord Shiva and Uma were travelling by aerial route when suddenly Uma saw the weak Balkhilyas engaged in penance. She was saddened to see their frail bodies and requested Lord Shiva to end their miseries. Lord Shiva told her that the Balkhilyas had not attained a bit of virtuousness inspite of their severe penance. "They have still not become free from anger and desires", said Lord Shiva. But Uma was reluctant to believe his words. Lord Shiva then asked her to wait there and himself went to show their real worth to her to prove his point.

Lord Shiva then shed his apparels and became naked. As a mendicant, he visited the hermitages of all the Balkhilyas. At that time the Balkhilyas were engaged in penance and hence only womenfolk were present at the

hermitages. The womenfolk, infatuated by Lord Shiva, started running after him. When the Balkhilyas came to know about this, they uprooted his private organ (Linga) and threw it on the ground. Hardly had the Linga fallen on the ground, the whole world got engulfed by the process of destruction. All the sages and learned saints became worried and went to seek Lord Brahma's help. Lord Brahma revealed to them that this destruction was due to Shiva's wrath. He also told them about the futility of their penance as they were still under the influence of anger and lust. "You cannot attain perfection until your flaws are removed", said Lord Brahma.

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SAGES TAKE LORD SHIVA'S REFUGE

Ashamed, the sages requested Lord Brahma to tell them the way to pacify Lord Shiva. Lord Brahma assured them that they would be forgiven if

they took Lord Shiva's refuge. Lord Brahma went to Kailash Parvat accompanied by all the sages. After reaching there, he eulogised Lord Shiva with deep devotion. The sages also worshipped Lord Shiva.

Lord Shiva was satisfied by their eulogy and devotion. He instructed the sages to establish the severed Linga at Sanihitya Sarovar. "By doing this, you would have all your desires fulfilled. The Linga would become famous by the name of Sthanu- the whole world. A devotee who pays a visit to this sacred place of pilgrimage would become liberated from all his sins", said Lord Shiva.

The sages returned to the place of Lord Shiva's fallen Linga. They tried their best to lift it but were unsuccessful in their attempt. They became worried and went to Lord Brahma for help. Lord Brahma told them- "Since Shiva's Linga had fallen on his own will, hence nobody except him can lift that Linga." All of them went back to Kailash Parvat but Lord Shiva was nowhere to be found.

Lord Brahma went into a state of deep meditation and sighted Lord Shiva in the guise of an elephant. When Brahma and the deities proceeded on their way, they found a goddess with a kamandalu in hand and offered them Amrit. After being refreshed, the sages asked whether she knew of Lord Shiva's whereabouts. She told them that Lord Shiva was presently living in the middle of Sanihitya Sarovar. After reaching the reservoir, they found Lord Shiva in the guise of an elephant. They requested him to help them, establish his Linga at the desired place. Lord Shiva agreed. All of them then went to the site of Lord Shiva's fallen Linga. He lifted it with his trunk and established it towards the west of Sanihitya Sarovar. The sages were satisfied and expressed their gratitude to Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva, pleased by their eulogy and devotion, decided to make the Linga as his abode.

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GREATNESS OF STHANU TIRTHA

THE GREATNESS OF SANIHITYA SAROVAR AND STHANU TIRTHA

Sanatkumar says- Describing the greatness of Sanihitya Sarovar, Lord Shiva told the sages that a devotee cannot attain salvation unless he pays a visit to this sacred place of pilgrimage. There is no other Tirtha like this one. "I would be easily accessible to a devotee who worships me with total devotion." After saying this, Lord Shiva disappeared.

In course of time, the heaven became crowded with human beings due to virtues attained by going on pilgrimages to Sthanu Tirtha. The deities became worried at this development and went to seek Lord Brahma's help. Indra said- "If things continue like this then the heaven will be dominated by mortals and we will have no option but to move out from there. Now, its your duty to protect us." Lord Brahma ordered Indra to fill up Sanihitya Sarovar with mud so that the Sthanu Linga gets concealed and devotees no longer visited that sacred place of pilgrimage.

Sanihitya Sarovar was filled up with mud as Indra created a dust storm, which lasted for several days. But still Indra's objective remained unfulfilled as Lord Shiva lifted Sthanu Linga and Tirtha Vata (Banyan tree) in his hands. There were some sages present on the bank of Sanihitya Sarovar at the time of this incident. They smeared their bodies with that mud and due to this, all of them went to Brahma loka.

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OTHER PROMINENT LINGAS

Sanatkumar says- "The sacred places of pilgrimage named Shukra Tirtha and Soma Tirtha are situated towards north and south of Sthanu Vata

respectively. Daksha Tirtha is situated towards its south and Skand Tirtha towards its west. The sacrosanct Sthanu Tirtha is situated just in between all these four places of pilgrimage. Near Sthanu Tirtha is a Shivalinga and Goddess Uma dwells there. There is a Maha Linga established by Takshak towards the north of Sthanu Vata while the Shivalinga constructed by Vishwakarma is established towards the east.

By the side of that Banyan tree (Vata Tirtha) is situated- Bateshwar Linga, which was established by Lord Brahma. Some other prominent Lingas established in the vicinity of Sthanu Linga are-Gokama Maha Linga established by Ravana, Kumareshwar, Hastipadeshwar Shiva, Siddheshwar Linga, Hibhavateshwar Linga etc.

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KING VENA, BIRTH OF PRITHU

Sage Markandeya then goes on to describe about the splendours of Sthanu Tirtha- Surya was Manu's father. Vena was Manu's grandson. He

was wicked and always criticised the Vedas. Being displeased by his irreligious son, Vena's father left for the forest to do penance where he attained salvation.

In course of time, Vena's tyranny spread across the length and breadth of the earth. In a very short time, he became the lord of whole earth. He had strictly warned his subjects against worshipping any other deity except him. Sages became furious by his irreligious stricture and tried to change his mind but their efforts went in vain. Ultimately, Vena was killed by the angry sages. After his death, the sages churned his left hand, which resulted in the manifestation of a dwarf. The sages considered him to be unfit to become a ruler and churned Vena's right hand for the second time. This time, a divine entity manifested, who had all the auspicious signs on his body. The deities crowned this divine entity as the king and named him Prithu. Prithu proved to be a just king and his subjects were satisfied by his rule.

One day, sage Narada arrived at Prithu's court. Wanting to grab the opportunity, he asked Narada how his father could be liberated from his sins. Narada told him that his father was presently living among the Mlechchas and was suffering from diseases like consumption and leprosy. "He would be cured of his diseases if he is taken to Sthanu Tirtha and made to take a dip in the holy Sanihitya Sarovar", said Narada.

He went to the site and found his father living among the Mlechchas. After taking the Mlechchas' permission, he brought his father to Sthanu Tirtha. His effort of helping his father to take a bath was resisted by the deity- Vayu who said- "The waters of Sanihitya Sarovar would get polluted if such a lowly sinner took a bath in it. First of all, you must go on a pilgrimage and visit all the sacred places to make your father pure. Only then he will be entitled to take bath here".

Prithu accompanied by his father went on a pilgrimage and visited all the sacred places. When both of them returned to Sthanu Tirtha, his father had become pure by this time. Vena took his bath and became liberated from his sins. He worshipped Lord Sthanu and eulogised him with total devotion.

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VENA ATTAINS HEAVEN

Sanatkumar says- "Lord Shiva became pleased by his devotion and blessed Vena that he would manifest from his body as Andhak in his next

birth. Due to the sins acquired by criticising the Vedas, he would be born in the family of the notorious demon Hiranyaksh." Lord Shiva then asked Vena to demand any boon.

Vena requested Lord Shiva to bless his attendant who had transformed into a dog due to his sin acquired by eating divine food. Lord Shiva blessed the attendant as a result of which, he regained his original form. Right then, Prithu arrived there. After seeing him, Vena expressed his gratitude for his tremendous effort without which, he would not have been liberated from his sins. After blessing Prithu, Vena departed for heaven.

In his father's absence, Prithu continued to rule justly. He performed many religious activities and gave unlimited donations to the Brahmins. After ruling for a long period, he went to Kurukshetra where he did a severe penance and attained the supreme abode after his death.

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THE ORIGIN OF BRAHMESHWAR'S FOUR HEADS

After creating all the movable and immovable living things, Lord Brahma created a beautiful lady. He was so infatuated by her beauty that he

expressed his desire to procreate with her help. As a result of this grave sin committed by Lord Brahma, one of his four heads got detached and fell on the ground. He carried his severed head and went to Sanihitya Sarovar to atone for his sins. After reaching that site, he established a four-headed Shivalinga and worshipped it daily. Pleased by his devotion, Lord Shiva appeared before him. He blessed Lord Brahma and said-"You have become free from the sin due to the virtue attained by establishing a four-headed Shivalinga at this sacred place." After blessing him, Lord Shiva disappeared.

After getting liberated from his sin, Lord Brahma worshipped the idol of four-headed Mahadeva and established another Shivalinga in the middle of a nearby lake. He also created a reservoir, which is named after him- Brahmasar. He established two other Shivalingas- one towards the east of his hermitage and another at the bank of river Saraswati. A devotee who goes on a pilgrimage to these sacred places created by Lord Brahma becomes liberated from all his sins and attains salvation.

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PRITHUDAK TIRTHA

Describing the majesty of Prithudak Tirtha, Mahadeva told the deities- "All of you must pay a visit to this sacrosanct place of pilgrimage situated

near Sanihitya reservoir. The day on which Moon, Sun and Jupiter unitedly come under Mrigshira Nakshatra is called Akshay Tritiya. You must go to that sacred place and perform Shradha of your ancestors."

All the deities led by Indra went to Kurukshetra where Prithudak was situated. Brihaspati was also present with them. After taking their bath, the deities requested Brihaspati (Jupiter) to enter into the Mrigshira Nakshatra as directed by Mahadeva. Brihaspati agreed to do that and entered into the Mrigshira Nakshatra along with the Sun and the Moon on Akshay Tritiya.

All the deities then worshipped their dead ancestors by offering Pind comprising of sesame seeds and honey. The ancestors were pleased and presented Mena to the deities. The deities in turn presented Mena to Himalaya. Himalaya was pleased to have Mena as his wife. In course of time, three daughters were born to them.

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BIRTH OF UMA AND HER MARRIAGE TO SHIVA

MENA GIVES BIRTH TO UMA

Mena gave birth to three daughters and a son. The eldest daughter- Ragini was red complexioned and had red eyes. Kutila was fair complexioned and had beautiful eyes like that of lotus petals. The youngest daughter- Kali was dark complexioned and had beautiful eyes like the petals of blue lotus. Mena also had a son named Sunam.

When all three of them were of six years, they started to do penance. The deities saw these beautiful girls and were enchanted by their beauty. Aditya and the Vasu Ganas took Kutila to Brahma loka and asked Lord Brahma- "O lord! Will this girl give birth to a son capable of killing Mahishasura?"

Lord Brahma told them that she was incapable of bearing the effulgence of Lord Shiva and hence she should be released. Kutila was dejected by Lord Brahma's rejection and challenged him that she would try every means so as to attain the capability of holding the effulgence of Lord Shiva. Lord Brahma became angry with her arrogant utterances and cursed her to become a river. In a very short period, the furious current of Kutila over-flooded the whole Brahma loka but Lord Brahma managed to control her current. In this way, Kutila remained in Brahma loka in the form of a river.

When the deities saw Ragini doing penance, they took her to Lord Brahma. Even she was cursed by Lord Brahma in the same manner as her sister had been cursed. Due to Lord Brahma's curse, she became Sandhya (evening) and started for the auspicious yoga of Kritika.

After losing her two daughters, Mena tried to dissuade Kali from doing penance. But Kali was not to listen. Reacting to her mother's advises, Kali pronounced 'U' 'Ma' and as a result she was named Uma by her mother. Uma commenced her severe penance to please Lord Shiva. When Lord Brahma came to know about this, he instructed the deities to bring her along to Brahma loka but the deities were unsuccessful in their attempt as Uma's radiance was unbearable for them. They returned to Brahma loka and narrated the whole story to Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma was convinced that Uma was worthy of being Shiva's consort. One day, Himalaya, Uma's father brought her back home.

Once, Lord Shiva went to Himalaya Mountain to do penance. When

Himalaya came to know of his arrival, he was extremely happy. He made all necessary arrangements for Lord Shiva. One day, while Lord Shiva was engrossed in meditation, Uma arrived there. Lord Shiva was pleased to know that Sati had re-incarnated as Uma. But his joy was momentary as he went back into deep meditation. Uma paid her obeisance by touching Shiva's feet. Lord Shiva wanting to test Uma's devotion went into hiding.

Uma sought her father's permission to do penance with the objective of having Shiva as her husband. Himalaya agreed and gave his permission. She started her penance after creating an earthen idol of Lord Shiva. She worshipped that idol with total devotion. Lord Shiva became pleased with her devotion and appeared before her in the guise of a mendicant. On being enquired by Uma, Lord Shiva told her that he was on his pilgrimage to Prithudak. "I am used to all these austerities as I have been practising it since my childhood. But why are you torturing yourself in such a tender age?", asked Lord Shiva.

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When the deities saw Ragini doing penance, they took her to Lord Brahma. Even she was cursed by Lord Brahma in the same manner as her sister had been cursed. Due to Lord Brahma's curse, she became Sandhya (evening) and started for the auspicious yoga of Kritika.

After losing her two daughters, Mena tried to dissuade Kali from doing penance. But Kali was not to listen. Reacting to her mother's advises, Kali pronounced 'U' 'Ma' and as a result she was named Uma by her mother. Uma commenced her severe penance to please Lord Shiva. When Lord Brahma came to know about this, he instructed the deities to bring her along to Brahma loka but the deities were unsuccessful in their attempt as Uma's radiance was unbearable for them. They returned to Brahma loka and narrated the whole story to Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma was convinced that Uma was worthy of being Shiva's consort. One day, Himalaya, Uma's father brought her back home.

Once, Lord Shiva went to Himalaya Mountain to do penance. When Himalaya came to know of his arrival, he was extremely happy. He made all necessary arrangements for Lord Shiva. One day, while Lord Shiva was engrossed in meditation, Uma arrived there. Lord Shiva was pleased to know that Sati had re-incarnated as Uma. But his joy was momentary as he went back into deep meditation. Uma paid her obeisance by touching Shiva's feet. Lord Shiva wanting to test Uma's devotion went into hiding.

Uma sought her father's permission to do penance with the objective of having Shiva as her husband. Himalaya agreed and gave his permission. She started her penance after creating an earthen idol of Lord Shiva. She worshipped that idol with total devotion. Lord Shiva became pleased with her devotion and appeared before her in the guise of a mendicant. On being enquired by Uma, Lord Shiva told her that he was on his pilgrimage to Prithudak. "I am used to all these austerities as I have been practising it since my childhood. But why are you torturing yourself in such a tender age?", asked Lord Shiva.

Lomaprabha, Uma's companion was also present there. She told the mendicant about the objective with which Uma was doing her penance. "She wants to have Lord Shiva as her husband", said Lomaprabha. Hearing this, the mendicant laughed loudly and made fun of Shiva. He

tried to dissuade Uma from marrying Lord Shiva. Uma became extremely angry and asked the mendicant to keep mum. But when the mendicant continued with his abuses, she got up and tried to move away from the side. Lord Shiva became pleased by her total devotion and appeared in his real form. He assured Uma to go back home and said- "I will send the sages to your house with a marriage proposal. The idol which you have been worshipping with such deep devotion would become famous as Bhadreshwar.

Uma returned home and Shiva proceeded on his way to Prithudak.

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LORD SHIVA SENDS MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

After paying a visit to Prithudak Tirtha, Lord Shiva returned to his abode. At that time, he was living at Mandar Mountain. After Lord Shiva's

contemplation, the Saptarishis arrived. After the formal salutations, Lord Shiva told the sages that his wife- Sati has re-incamated as Uma. "All of you must go to Himalaya and request him to marry his daughter to me", said Lord Shiva. The Saptarishis abided by his instructions.

All of them went to Himalaya with Shiva's proposal. When Uma came to know about this, she was quite pleased but did not reveal her emotions. Himalaya was in a dilemma. He did not know whether to refuse or accept the marriage proposal. The Meru Mountain advised him to go ahead with the marriage as it would not be proper to refuse the Saptarishis.

Mena, Himalaya's wife said- "O lord of the mountain! The dead ancestors gave Uma to me on the condition that I would get her married with Shiva. The son born to her would kill the demons- Mahishasura and Tarakasura. At last Himalaya agreed. The Saptarishis were pleased and chose an auspicious moment for the marriage ceremony. They said- "Shiva would marry your daughter on Maitra Muhurta- the third day from today when the Moon will enter the Uttar Phalguni Nakshatra." After saying this, the Saptarishis returned to Mandar Mountain and gave the good news to Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva became pleased and worshipped the Saptarishis. The Saptarishis then went to inform all the deities about Shiva's marriage.

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UMA MARRIES LORD SHIVA

Lord Vishnu, Brahma, the deities and the Ganas were pleased to hear about Shiva's marriage. Lord Shiva went to his abode- Kailash Mountain

to make preparations for the marriage ceremony.

Lord Shiva's marriage procession proceeded towards Himalaya Mountain. His appearance was quite terrifying with a tiger skin around his waist and Gorochan Tilak on his forehead. He had a garland of skulls around his neck. Snakes were coiling all around his body. His mount- Vrishabh (ox) was walking in a majestic way. The marriage procession comprised of the deities, Yakshas, demons and his Ganas. Lord Vishnu had Goddess Lakshmi by his side and was mounted on Garuda (eagle) while Lord Brahma was mounted on Hans (swan).

When the marriage procession reached its destination, Himalaya received his esteemed guests with great honor and guided them to his palace. The womenfolk envied Uma as they glanced at the handsome appearance of Lord Shiva. Uma was looking divinely beautiful in her white coloured silken apparel. At last, both the bride and the bridegroom entered the canopy where the marriage ceremony was supposed to be performed.

Himalaya placing Uma's hand in Shiva's, requested him to accept her as his wife. Lord Shiva said- "O king of the mountains! Despite being homeless, I agree to accept your daughter as my wife." After that, both Shiva and Uma tied the nuptial knot and circumambulated the sacred fire for three times. Both of them made offerings to the sacred fire. As Uma touched Shiva's feet, Lord Brahma got a chance to have a glimpse of her beautiful face. He was so infatuated by her divine beauty that he ejaculated. Nobody except Lord Shiva was aware of this incident. Lord Brahma tried to conceal his ejaculated sperms (Veerya) under the soil. But Lord Shiva prohibited him from doing so and said- "Don't destroy this Virya. From it would manifest 80,000 Balkhilyas."

Lord Shiva's prophesies came true and in a very short time, 80,000 Balkhilyas appeared there. Lord Shiva then returned to Mandar Parvat accompanied by his consort, Uma.

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VISHWAKARMA CONSTRUCTS A PALACE

After reaching Mandar Mountain, Lord Shiva instructed Vishwakarma to construct a home. Vishwakarma constructed a spacious home for Shiva,

which was spread in the area of 64 Yojans. The home was decorated with Swastika symbols and its walls were made of gold.

One day, Lord Shiva jokingly referred to Uma as Kali because of her dark complexion. But Uma did not take his comments lightly and told Shiva that she was going to the Himalayas to do her penance so that he did not dare to call her by that name again. Thus, Uma went to Himalaya Mountain and commenced her penance. Standing on one feet, she engaged herself in severe penance. One day, a lion arrived and seeing Uma standing on one feet, waited patiently for the moment when she would lose her balance and fall into its clutches. Uma continued with her penance for one hundred years by continuously chanting the sacred Brahma mantra. Pleased by her devotion, Lord Brahma appeared before her and asked what she wished for. Uma first of all requested him to bless the lion with immense power. She then requested him to bless her with a golden complexion. Lord Brahma blessed her and disappeared. She abandoned her dark complexioned skin from which manifested Kaushiki. Now, her complexion turned golden due to Lord Brahma's blessings. Indra appeared before her and sought her permission to take Kaushiki along with him. Uma gave her consent without any hesitation.

Indra took Kaushiki to Vindhya Mountain and requested her to stay there. He said- "You would become famous as Vindhya Vasini and would be revered even by the deities." He presented a lion to her and went back to his abode. On the other hand, Uma returned to Mandar Mountain and lived happily. Lord Shiva became so deeply attached to her that he forgot about his duties and as a result of which, the whole world became disturbed. The deities became scared by this development and went to seek Lord Brahma's advice.

Lord Brahma went to Mandar Mountain accompanied by all the deities. They tried to enter Shiva's abode but Nandi- Shiva's mount did not let them in. Helpless, all of them waited eagerly for the time Shiva would come out. Agni seeing rows of swans coming out from Shiva's abode disguised himself as a swan and thus managed to get inside. He went near Lord Shiva and said-"O lord! The deities are anxiously waiting for you outside. How come, you are not aware of this?" Lord Shiva immediately got up and ran towards the deities.

Indra and other deities were scared at the prospect of losing heaven to Lord Shiva's progeny. So, they requested Lord Shiva not to procreate any child from Uma. Lord Shiva agreed but asked them as to who was capable of holding his out-flowing sperms. Agni came forward and swallowed each drop of Shiva's sperm. Satisfied, the deities left. Lord Shiva went inside and told everything to Uma. She became furious and cursed the deities that they too would remain sonless just like her.

One day before taking her bath, Uma applied Ubtan (mixture of sandalwood, turmeric etc.) on her body. She then peeled off the paste from her body and made an elephant-headed image from it. Malini, her companion assisted her in taking bath. Malini was smiling all the while as Uma was taking her bath. Uma became curious and wanted to know the reason of her strange smile. Malini told Uma about her firm belief that one day, she (Uma) would definitely become a mother. Uma told her that this was impossible as the deities had prohibited her husband, Shiva from procreating a child. But Malini continued to smile. After taking her bath, Uma went back home.

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After sometime, Lord Shiva arrived and took his bath at the same place. The elephant-headed image created by Uma was lying there. Suddenly it became alive and started making a hissing sound from his trunk. Lord Shiva delightfully took him to Uma and said- "Look at your son." Uma

was surprised to see that elephant-headed image alive and affectionately embraced him. Lord Shiva again said- "Your son will become famous as Vinayak and the whole world would worship him." Lord Shiva then entrusted the task of child's security to Ghatodar.

Thus, both Lord Shiva and Uma lived happily. The same Uma later on took incarnation as Goddess Katyayani and killed the demons- Shumbh and Nishumbh.

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KILLING OF NISHUMBH AND SHUMBH

Shumbh and Nishumbh were sons of Danu. They wanted to avenge Mahishasura's death and sent many demons like to bring Goddess

Chandika after enslaving her. First of all, Sugreev was sent followed by Dhumralochan but both of them were killed by the Goddess. When Shumbh and Nishumbh heard of their death, they were infuriated. Nishumbh attacked the goddess with a huge army. Shumbh attacked from the other side. In the fierce battle, Goddess Chandika broke Nishumbh's sword as well as his shield. Nishumbh then attacked Goddess Chandika with his weapon- Shakti. Goddess Chandika broke it with her Chakra. At last, she attacked him with her arrows at him and as a result, Nishumbh got injured and fell.

When Shumbh saw Nishumbh, injured and unconscious, he ran towards Goddess Chandika to kill her. Goddess Chandika blew her conch and made a thunderous noise by pulling the bowstring. Shumbh released the dangerous weapon- Ugradipti in the direction of Goddess Chandika. But her weapon Maholkanamni destroyed it. Shumbh thundered loudly and attacked Goddess Chandika with a volley of arrows but none could cause any harm to her. Finally, Goddess Chandika attacked Shumbh with her trident. Shumbh fell down unconscious. After sometime, he regained his consciousness and attacked Goddess Chandika with his arrows. But she destroyed all the arrows. In the meantime, Nishumbh had regained his consciousness. He got up and attacked Goddess Chandika with his trident. In the end, Goddess Chandika killed Nishumbh by piercing her trident in his heart. As Nishumbh was dying, an another demon manifested from his body. Even he was killed by her. Her mount Simha devoured all the dead demons.

Shumbh became angry at the death of his brother Nishumbh. He furiously told the goddess- "O wicked lady! Do not be proud of your strength borrowed from others." Goddess Chandika replied- "O wicked demon! I am the only power of this whole universe. I am the origin of cause and effect. Look! All the divinities are entering into my body.

The next moment, all the divine entities, which had earlier manifested from the bodies of the deities united with the goddess. Now, the goddess was alone. A tremendous battle was fought between Goddess Chandika and Shumbh. Ambika attacked him with numerous divine weapons. But, Shumbh neutralised her attack with his own weapons.

Shumbh covered the whole body of Goddess Chandika with his arrows.

She broke his bow. After this, Shumbh attacked her with his weapon-Shakti, which was broken into pieces by her chakra. Now, Shumbh took out his sword and attacked her with it. She broke his shield and sword with her arrows. Shumbh then attacked her with his mace. Even his mace was broken into pieces.

Shumbh had no more weapons left with him. He hit the goddess on her breast with his clenched fist. She slapped him so hard on the face that he fell down. The next moment, he got up and manifested himself in the sky. Now, a tremendous duel was fought between them in the sky.

In the end, she dashed him to the ground and pierced the trident in his heart. Shumbh was instantly killed. After the killing of Shumbh, Gandharvas, the deities and Apsaras were so pleased that they danced and rejoiced. The whole atmosphere echoed with the sound- "Shanti Shanti" (Let there be peace).

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After goddess Chandika killed Shumbh, all the deities under the leadership of Indra and Agni started eulogising her- "O Goddess! Be pleased upon us! Protect the whole world, as you are the goddess of this whole universe. You appear in the form of this earth- the base on which

everything is situated. Your light illuminates all the living creatures. You are the only power through which creation, nurturing and annihilation takes place. You are the Brahmani, Maheshwari and the Kaumari. We salute you because you have protected us from the terror of the demons. We need your protection from all the calamities of this world."

Goddess Chandika was very pleased by their eulogy. She asked them for any wish. The deities said- "O Akhileshwari! We need your protection. Clear all the obstacles from our path. Eliminate our enemies."

Goddess Chandika replied- "During Vaivasvat Manavantar, I will take incarnation from Yashoda's womb, the wife of Nand, to kill the demons Shumbh and Nishumbh. After that, I will kill the demon Vaiprachit in my most aggressive form. One hundred years later, I will manifest myself and would be known as Satakshi because of my hundred eyes. My next incarnation would be known as Shakambhari because I would nurture the whole world during the period of drought. I will kill the demon Durgam during that drought period. I will kill the demon Arun- the tormentor of all the three worlds by taking the form of a bee. Due to this, I will be known as Bhramari. I will take incarnations every time the demons torment the world.

Goddess Chandika says- "I will clear all the obstacles from the path of such a man who worships me. If a devotee listens to the great tales of how I killed Mahishasura, Shumbh and Nishumbh, on the eighth, ninth and fourteenth days of any month then he would be liberated from poverty and all his sins. He would become free from fear. A devotee must listen to my divine tales during all the religious ceremonies like making sacrifice, worship and performing Yagya. By doing this, all his enemies will be eliminated. A man who remembers me when faced with dangerous situations remains protected by me."

After blessing the deities, Goddess Chandika disappeared from their sight. All the demons, who had survived after the killings of Shumbh and Nishumbh, went to the nether world to save their lives.

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BIRTH OF KARTIKEYA

Swallowing of Lord Shiva's sperm had subdued Agni's radiance. The deities advised him to take Lord Brahma's help. While he was on his way

to Brahma loka, he came across a river named Kutila and requested her to hold Shiva's sperm. She agreed and requested him to release it in her waters.

In course of time, she became pregnant. The thought of giving birth to an illegitimate child tormented her, so she went to Lord Brahma to take his advice. Lord Brahma instructed her to abort her foetus at Udyachal Mountain, which was covered by the dense forest of reed. Lord Brahma felt that it was a very safe place for her and nobody will be aware of this incident. Kutila followed his instructions.

Kutila aborted her foetus just according to Lord Brahma's instructions. The foetus remained there for 10,000 years after which a child was born, radiant like a rising Sun and eyes like the petals of lotus flower. The child being hungry started to cry. At that time, all the six Kritikas were passing through that forest. They were so mesmerised by the child's beauty that they started quarrelling among themselves as to who should first feed breast milk to the child. Seeing their quarrel, the child appeared with his six heads. This way, all the six Kritikas fed their breast milk to the child at a time. This is the reason why Kartikeya has six heads.

After Agni came to know of Kartikeya's birth, he proceeded to bring him back home. But Kutila saw him on the way and enquired about his journey. When Agni revealed his intention, she started quarrelling with him for Kartikeya's custody. Meanwhile, Lord Vishnu arrived there and enquired regarding their quarrelling. Lord Vishnu after being told the reason advised them to take Lord Shiva's help as he was the best judge on such matters.

Both Kutila and Agni went to Lord Shiva and tried to get his consent. Uma advised Lord Shiva by saying- "All of us must go to that place where the child is living and try to know as to whom he would like to have as his guardian." All of them went to that reed forest and found Kartikeya in the lap of one of the Kritikas.

Kartikeya knew about their desires. Seeing them worried, he manifested in four different appearances of Kumar, Vishakh, Shakh and Mahasen. Kumar went towards Lord Shiva while Vishakh went towards Uma. Similarly, Shakh went towards Kutila while Mahasen went towards Agni.

Thus, everybody was satisfied. Lord Shiva then blessed the Kritikas by saying that Kartikeya would become famous deriving his name from them.

All the deities arrived there and decided to make Kartikeya, the chief commander of their army.

BIRTH OF KARTIKEYA

Swallowing of Lord Shiva's sperm had subdued Agni's radiance. The deities advised him to take Lord Brahma's help. While he was on his way to Brahma loka, he came across a river named Kutila and requested her to hold Shiva's sperm. She agreed and requested him to release it in her waters.

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KARTIKEYA KILLS TARAKA AND MAHISHASURA

After being appointed as the chief commander of the deities, Kartikeya sought his guardians' permission to kill the demons- Taraka and

Mahishasura. All the deities including Lord Vishnu blessed Kartikeya and wished for his victory. Lord Vishnu eulogised Kartikeya and praised his valiance.

Kartikeya then proceeded with a huge army comprising of Ganas and Kritikas. Kartikeya had taken an aerial route so that he could reach his enemies' territory as soon as possible. The Ganas disguised as birds, followed him.

As they were about to reach their enemy's place, Kartikeya requested the Ganas to descend to the earth. The Ganas followed his instruction and descended to the earth making a thunderous noise. Some demons like Mahish, Taraka, Virochan, Jambh and Kujambh heard this noise and went to Andhak to inform him about it.

As the demons were trying to find out the cause of the noise, a demon-Patalketu arrived there in an injured condition. The demons were surprised and asked how he got injured. Patalketu, narrating the incident said- "I had entered sage Galav's hermitage in the guise of a boar with the intention of killing him. Suddenly, an arrow pierced my body. I ran towards the seacoast to save my life where I found large number of people who were planning to kill Mahishasura and Taraka. I have come here to inform you about their plan. I am very scared and worried." Andhak assured them that there was nothing to worry about as both Mahishasura and Taraka were mighty and it was not an easy task for anybody to kill them.

When Mahishasura and Taraka came to know about this, they immediately set out with a huge army towards the seacoast. An intense battle commenced in which both the sides fought valiantly. The Ganas and the Matrikas launched a severe attack on the enemy with all the weapons they had at their disposal. But the demons remained unaffected and their assault was too much for the Ganas to bear.

After defeating the Ganas, Mahishasura menacingly ran towards Kartikeya. Suchakraksh who was fighting from Kartikeya's side unleashed his chakra to stop Mahishasura. Mahishasura retaliated by attacking the chakra with his mace but his mace was cut into pieces by the chakra. After destroying the mace, Suchakraksh's chakra chased Mahishasura.

When Banasura saw Mahishasura's life in danger, he came forward to help him. He attacked the chakra with his 500 hands and grabbed Suchakraksh with the remaining 500. Seeing Suchakraksh in danger, Makaraksh hit Banasura on his head with his mace. Seething in pain, Banasura immediately released Suchakraksh.

Seeing his army defeated, Taraka came forward to fight with a sword. He fought valiantly and defeated the Ganas and the Matrikas in a very short time. The defeated Ganas took the refuge of Kartikeya. When Kartikeya saw Taraka chasing the Ganas, he killed him with his weapon-Shakti. Taraka's death scared Mahishasura and Banasura. To save his life, Mahishasura ran away towards Himalaya Mountain while Banasura hid himself in the ocean. Kartikeya chased Mahishasura as a result of which, he was forced to abandon Himalaya. Mahishasura now took refuge in a cave of the Kraunch Mountain. Seeing the demon being protected by his maternal cousin- Guh (cave), Kartikeya was in a dilemma. He knew that if he attacked Mahishasura inside the cave then his cousin- Guh might get hurt. He waited for Mahishasura to come out.

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Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Mahesh appeared and advised Kartikeya to kill the demon. Indra too advised him the same. But Kartikeya did not pay heed and told them that he would kill Mahishasura only after he came out from the cave.

Furious, Indra told Kartikeya that a man did not become a sinner if he killed one person to safeguard his community's interest. Giving his own instance, he narrated as to how he had killed his own brother- Namuchi. But Kartikeya was not convinced and refused to act according to Indra's instruction. Very soon, their arguments turned into a major dispute when Indra boasted of his strength. Kartikeya challenged him for a duel. Indra proposed a plan according to which, whoever circumambulated the Kraunch Mountain first would be considered as the winner.

When Kartikeya returned after circumambulating Kraunch Mountain, he found Indra sitting there. Furiously, he asked Indra why he was seated. Indra replied that he was the winner as he had already finished circumambulating the Kraunch. Both of them quarrelled but were not able to decide the winner. So, both of them went to Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Brahma to take their help. Lord Vishnu advised them that only Kraunch Mountain could decide the winner. Both of them went to Kraunch Mountain and requested him to tell as to who the winner was. Kraunch Mountain said- "Indra is the winner since he was the first to circumambulate me. Kartikeya became furious and attacked Kraunch Mountain with his Shakti as a result of which, the great mountain was fragmented into pieces. Mahishasura who was hiding in the cave of Kraunch Mountain was also crushed to death.

Later on, Kartikeya felt very sorry for having killed his maternal cousin-Guh and after being advised by Lord Vishnu, he went to Prithudak Tirtha to atone for his sin.

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RITUDHWAJ INJURES PATALKETU

King Ripujeet- a descendant of Raghu lived with his valiant and brave son named Ritudhwaj. Ritudhwaj being a virtuous prince thought it as his

duty to protect all the sages and hermits. Under his protection, the sages performed their religious duties without any problem.

During Ripujeet's reign, a great sage, Galav lived in his hermitage doing penance. A demon named Patalketu used to torment him. Although Galav was capable of burning Patalketu to death yet he hesitated to do so for the fear of losing his virtuosity. One day, sage Galav was contemplating on the means to get rid of Patalketu's terror tactics but was unable to find any solution and let out a deep sigh in frustration. He was amazed to see a horse falling from the sky. As he was looking towards the sky, he heard a heavenly voice- "This horse can travel thousands of Yojans in a single day. Give this horse to Ritudhwaj who will solve your problems."

As per the instructions of that heavenly voice, Galav presented that horse to Ritudhwaj and engaged himself in penance. This horse was sent by a Gandharva king named Vishwavasu with a special purpose. Vishwavasu had a beautiful daughter named Madalasa. Infatuated by her beauty, the demon- Patalketu had abducted her to Patal loka. He wanted to marry her but Madalasa rejected his advances. Vishwavasu knew that only Ritudhwaj was capable of killing Patalketu, so he presented that horse to sage Galav with the instruction that it should be given to Ritudhwaj.

Ritudhwaj went to Patal loka on that horse and fought a fierce battle in which Patalketu was seriously injured. Ritudhwaj released Madalasa from Patalketu's captivity and married her.

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LORD SHIVA DOES PENANCE

Lord Shiva was so deeply attached to Uma that for 1000 years, he was possessed by only her thoughts. He forgot about his duties and as a

result, there was anarchy all over the world. His obsession with Uma had also decreased his radiance. He decided to do penance with the objective of regaining his radiance.

When Uma came to know about his decision, she was unhappy but Lord Shiva consoled her by relating the significance of his decision. Before leaving, he entrusted the responsibility of her security to Nandi. He started wandering in search of a suitable place for doing penance. Sometimes, he did penance under the tree, sometimes on the mountain peaks and sometimes on the banks of a river. Initially, he used to eat only kand and Moola but later on he stopped eating even that and lived only on air. This way, 900 years passed during which he travelled to all the three lokas.

Ultimately, he even stopped breathing. He inserted a small wooden block in his mouth to stop the air from entering his body. This act of Shiva resulted in the tremendous generation of energy inside his body as a result of which that wooden block blasted off through his skull and fell on the Himalaya Mountain with such force that the wooden block levelled numerous peaks of Himalaya Mountain to the ground. The famous place of pilgrimage- Kedarnath is situated at this very place.

After that, Lord Shiva did a severe penance by immersing his whole body in the waters of Saraswati river. He remained immersed in the water for one complete year and did not come out. All the seven worlds including the oceans and the mountains started shaking violently. The stars and the Nakshatras started falling down on the earth. Curious to know why this happened, the worried deities went to Lord Brahma. Even Lord Brahma could not satisfy their curiosity as he had no answer. All of them then went to Lord Vishnu but he too was not aware of the reason.

All the deities including Lord Vishnu then went to Mandar Parvat to see Lord Shiva. But they were surprised to find out that neither Lord Shiva nor Uma were present there. Lord Vishnu was aware of Lord Shiva's penance in the Saraswati river. Due to the sin of causing Mridani's foetus to abort, the deities could not know the fact behind this strange event.

The deities then performed the most austere Taptakrichcha Vrata to atone for their sin. Lord Vishnu then gave them a glimpse of Shivalinga,

which manifested in his heart. All the deities again worshipped that Shivalinga and made offerings. Lord Vishnu then took them to Kurukshetra where Lord Shiva was doing his penance in the waters of Saraswati. The deities eulogised Lord Shiva by saying "STHANAVE NAMAH" and Indra requested him to stop doing his penance as the whole world was in turbulence. Lord Shiva accepted their request with a smile and discontinued with his penance.

Even after Lord Shiva had stopped doing his penance, the earth continued to shake violently. Surprised, he started wandering here and there to know the truth behind this turbulence. He found sage Shukracharya doing penance on the bank of river Oghavati with the objective of learning the most secret MritsanJivani Vidya. Lord Shiva blessed him and his desire was fulfilled but the earth still continued to shake violently. Lord Shiva then proceeded towards Saptasaraswat where he found sage Mankanak was dancing in joy and his steps were causing the earth to shake.

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Sage Mankanak had acquired tremendous virtues due to his severe penance and as a result instead of blood, vegetative juice secreted from his wound. He had become arrogant and thought that it happened only because of his penance. Lord Shiva then subdued his arrogance by

causing wound on his finger from which ashes poured out. Sage Mankanak was ashamed of himself and stopped dancing, and the earth became calm once again.

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LORD VISHNU KILLS MURA

Mura was the Aurasputra of sage Kashyapa and Danu. When he saw the demons being vanquished by the deities, he went to do penance with the objective of getting boons from Lord Brahma. When Lord Brahma appeared before him, he said- "O lord! Bless me with a boon, which enables me to kill anybody merely by the touch of my hand." Lord Brahma blessed him and said- "So be it."

Getting this boon made Mura very arrogant. He challenged the deities, Yakshas and Kinnars to fight him but nobody accepted his challenge as they were scared of his power. He then entered Amravati- Indra's capital and challenged Indra for a duel. Indra became terrified and abandoned his abode- heaven. Now, Mura became the lord of heaven and very soon, he invited the other demons to join him in heaven.

Once, Mura challenged a king named Raghu who was proficient in rituals for a duel. At that time, Raghu was busy performing his Yagya. He admonished Mura by saying- "What is the great deal in fighting with the mortals? If you are really that brave then you should defeat Yamaraj." The arrogant Mura then went to Yama loka and challenged Yama. Yama was aware of Lord Brahma's boon given to Mura. So, he went to take Lord Vishnu's help. Lord Vishnu advised him to send Mura to Vishnu loka by any means.

Yama returned to his abode where he found Mura waiting for him. He said- "I am ready to accept your authority on the condition that you protect me from the wrath of my former master." Mura curiously asked Yama as to who his former master was. Yama then told him that his former master was none other than Lord Vishnu and he lived in Ksheersagar. Mura then went to Ksheersagar to fight Lord Vishnu.

When Mura reached Ksheersagar, Lord Vishnu asked him the reason for his arrival. Mura confidently said that he had come to fight him. Lord Vishnu had worked out an excellent plan to kill Mura and the time had now arrived for its implementation. Lord Vishnu said- "If you have come to fight me then why are you trembling with fear and why is your heart beating so fast? I do not fight cowards." Furious at Lord Vishnu's words, Mura put his hand on his own chest to convince Lord Vishnu that his

heartbeat was normal. The moment he put his hand on his chest, he fell down and finding the moment opportune, Lord Vishnu killed him with the chakra.

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DESCRIPTION OF HELLS

Lord Brahma, on being enquired by Sanatkumar on the different hells said- "Those who have illicit relationship or are in the company of sinners go to the first hell. Felling of trees and stealing the fruits of others' tree lead to the second hell. People who kill creatures unworthy of killing and those who quarrel over property dispute go to third hell. Terrorising the living creatures and deviating from one's own religion lead to the fourth hell. Behaving deceitfully with friends and taking false oath lead to the fifth hell. Keeping somebody in captivity and causing hurdles in the path of others would lead to the sixth hell. Stealing of royal property or copulating with the queen leads to the seventh hell. Greed and misuse of hard earned money lead to the eighth hell. Stealing of Brahmin's property and condemning others lead to the ninth hell. People who lack courtesy or who steal sacred texts go to the tenth hell." Altogether, Lord Brahma described about 16 hells.

DESCRIPTION OF HELLS

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KING DANDA AND ARAJA

ANDHAKASURA- THE DEMON

Narada asks sage Pulastya- "What did the demon Andhak do after entering Patal loka and how was Lord Shiva's life at Mandar Mountain?" Pulastya says- "Andhak was infatuated by Girija's divine beauty and his lust only became stronger as the days passed by. Although Prahlada tried very hard to convince him and narrated the tale of his birth, which happened only because of Lord Shiva's blessing. Once Lord Shiva was engrossed in meditation when Uma playfully shut all his three eyes and the whole atmosphere was covered in darkness. An entity manifested from that darkness who was presented to Hiranyaksh and who later on became famous as Andhak. Prahlada also told him that his lust for his own mother (Parvati) was licentious and most immoral."

In order to dissuade Andhak from going ahead with his immoral intention, Prahlada narrated a story, which described the destruction of an immoral king named Danda. "Sage Shukracharya was the royal priest of King Danda, who performed all the religious rites. He had a daughter named Araja. Once Shukracharya had gone to meet the demon Vrishparva and stayed there for some days. King Danda went to Shukracharya's hermitage to find out the reasons for his absence. He saw Araja and became enchanted by her beauty. He expressed his desires to Araja that he wanted her at any cost. Araja tried to dissuade him by saying that his immoral action would amount to committing treachery towards his Guru- Shukracharya. She also tried to scare him by citing about her father's rage, which even the deities feared. King Danda then narrated this tale to force her to accept his proposal-

"Vishwakarma had a beautiful daughter- Chitrangada. Once, she had gone to take bath in the river with her companions. Suddenly, King Surath arrived there and being infatuated by her beauty became lovesick. Seeing his pitiable condition, Chitrangada offered herself to him despite her companions' objection."

After narrating this story, King Danda asked Araja to follow the example of Chitrangada. But she said- "You have narrated only half the story. I will tell you what happened after that." She then told this story- "The immoral act of Chitrangada had angered her father and he cursed her that her married life would be unsuccessful. One day, King Surath was drowned by the powerful current of the Saraswati. Chitrangada fainted as she could not bear the sorrow of her husband's separation. After regaining

her consciousness, she looked all around but could not find her husband. Once again, she became unconscious and fell in the Saraswati river. The powerful currents of Saraswati drowned her and she was ultimately thrown in Gomti river. Gomti's current abandoned her near a forest inhabited by ferocious lions."

After narrating her story, Araja told King Danda that she would certainly not accept his proposal as she did not want to meet the same fate as that of Chitrangada. The king told her that the story was still incomplete and narrated the following tale-

"When Chitrangada regained her consciousness, she found herself in a dense forest. Seeing her in a sorrowful mood, Anjan- a Guhyak consoled her by saying that very soon, she would re-unite with her husband. He also advised her to go on a pilgrimage to Srikanth. Chitrangada went to Srikanth situated towards the south of river Kalindi. After taking a bath in Kalindi river, she visited the Srikanth temple and worshipped Lord Maheshwar.

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Meanwhile, a sage arrived there and seeing Chitrangada queried about her staying in a deserted place. Chitrangada narrated the whole story as to how she was cursed by her own father. The sage became extremely furious after hearing her woeful tale and cursed Vishwakarma to become

a monkey. He also advised her to go to Saptagodavar and engage in the worship of Lord Hatkeshwar where one day she would meet Devavati- the daughter of demon Kandarmali. Chitrangada went to Saptagodavar and engaged herself in the worship of Lord Hatkeshwar. The sage wrote the following lines on the walls of Srikanth temple- "Is there anybody who could liberate this beautiful girl from her sorrow?"

After that, the sage proceeded on his pilgrimage to Pushkamath.

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VISHWAKARMA BECOMES A MONKEY

Continuing with his story, King Danda says- "Chitrangada stayed for a long period at Saptagodavar. She used to spend time by engaging in the

worship of Lord Hatkeshwar waiting for the day she would meet her husband. Vishwakarma had become a monkey due to the curse of that sage and started living at Shalveya Mountain.

One day, a demon named Kandarmali arrived at the foothills of Shalveya Mountain accompanied by his daughter- Vedavati. The monkey (Vishwakarma) held Vedavati by her hand. Kandarmali became furious and took out his sword to kill the monkey.

Sensing danger, the monkey ran away towards Himalaya Mountain carrying Vedavati in his lap. Kandarmali chased him. On the way, the monkey abandoned Vedavati at the door of a secluded hermitage and hid himself in the waters of river Kalindi but was drowned. Kandarmali had seen the monkey drowning and conjured that his daughter too might have drowned along with him. He returned to his abode in a remorseful mood.

The ferocious current of Kalindi river carried that monkey to a famous place called Shivi. After regaining his consciousness, he returned to the place where he had left Vedavati. After reaching that spot, he found Anjan accompanied by his daughter- Nandayanti treading along. He mistook Nandayanti for Vedavati and ran towards her. Sensing danger, Nandayanti jumped into the Hiranvati River and was carried by its ferocious current to Kaushal. When she regained her consciousness, Nandayanti found herself near a large Banyan tree. Sitting on the rock in a thoughtful mood, she heard a heavenly voice- 'Is there anybody who could inform sage Ritdhwaj about his son's captivity and who has been tied to this Banyan tree?' Nandayanti was surprised to find a 5 year old child being tied to the topmost branch of the Banyan tree. On being enquired, the child told her- "My name is Jabali. Sage Ritdhwaj is my father who has blessed me with 5000 years of childhood birth, 10,000 years of adolescence and 20 years of adulthood respectively. But he had also warned me of being held captive for the period of 500 years during my childhood. One day, I had gone to take bath in the Hiranvati River when suddenly, I came across a huge monkey who enslaved me. I am living here in captivity since then."

After narrating his story, Jabali enquired about Nandayanti's identity. Nandayanti told everything, which had happened to her. Jabali advised

her to go to Srikanth temple situated on the bank of river Yamuna and said- "There, you would meet my father Ritdhwaj who comes to the temple daily in the afternoon to worship Lord Shiva. You can seek his help." Nandayanti went to Ritdhwaj's hermitage as per the instruction of Jabali. One day while she was worshipping in the Srikanth temple, she saw those lines inscribed by the sage, who had once cursed her father- Vishwakarma. She added one more line to that inscription- "Sage Mudgal had prophesised that I would become a queen. Instead of becoming a queen, I am going through my most turbulent period. Is there anyone who could help me out?"

After that, she went to the bank of river Yamuna where she found a beautiful hermitage. She entered inside the hermitage and found Vedavati sitting there. Very soon, both of them became fast friends. In the meantime, sage Ritdhwaj had gone to offer prayers in the Srikanth temple and saw those lines inscribed on its walls. He went into deep contemplation and understood what those lines meant. After worshipping, he left for Ayodhya where he met King Ikshvaku. He requested Ikshvaku to instruct his son- Shakuni to release Jabali from the monkey's captivity.

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Ikshvaku instructed his son to fulfil sage Ritdhwaj's desire. All three of them including Ikshvaku went to the site of Jabali's captivity. Shakuni being a master archer, cut all the creepers that had grown around Jabali. Sage Ritdhwaj climbed up the tree and found that Jabali was tied to the

branch. He tried to open the knot but was unsuccessful and called Shakuni for help. Shakuni tried hard to open the knot but even he was unsuccessful. He then cut that branch into three pieces by unleashing a volley of arrows. Thus Jabali became free albeit partially as he was burdened with the three pieces of that branch.

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SEARCH FOR CHITRANGADA AND VEDAVATI

In the meantime, both daughters of Yaksha and the demon arrived at Srikanth Mahadeva temple and engaged themselves in the worship of

lord Mahadeva. One day, sage Galav arrived at the temple and was astonished to find two young ladies at such a deserted place. While taking bath, he heard the melodious songs of the two ladies. He became convinced of their divinity as it was impossible for mortals to sing with such expertise.

After the worship, sage Galav asked them their identity who then narrated the whole story. The next morning, as Galav was about to leave, both of them requested him to take them along. All three of them then left for Pushkar Tirtha. After reaching their destination, sage Galav decided to take a dip in the holy river. While taking bath, he saw many female fish trying to coax their male counterparts into making love by saying-"If sage Galav is not afraid of being in the company of young women then what makes you so scared in copulating with us?" The male fish replied that he was afraid of getting ridiculed by the public. Sage Galav was so ashamed of his conduct that he did not come out of the river.

Both ladies waited anxiously for sage Galav. Suddenly, Chitrangada arrived and was surprised to see strangers standing there. All three of them were looking at each other with surprised expressions on their face when Vedavati arrived there suddenly. She went near Chitrangada and enquired about her identity. Chitrangada narrated the whole story and revealed how circumstances had forced her to reach this place. In a very short time, all four of them became well acquainted with one another. They went to Hatkeshwar temple situated on the banks of Saptagodavar River and worshipped Lord Hatkeshwar. They started living in the temple premises and spent their time in the daily worship of Lord Hatkeshwar.

On the other side, Shakuni, Jabali and Ritdhwaj were anxiously searching them. During the search, Jabali went to Shakal Janpad accompanied by his father- Ritdhwaj. At that time, Shakal Janpad was ruled by Indradyumna- the son of Manu. After meeting him, Ritdhwaj sought his help in finding his lost daughter- Nandayanti. Indradyumna told him- "O Brahmin! Even I have lost my daughter and don't know where she is at present. So, all three of us must go in search of our respective daughters." After saying this, all three of them decided to proceed ahead in search of their daughter.

When they reached Badrikashrama, they were amazed to find a young man engaged in austere penance. After formal introduction, it dawned on Indradyumna that the young sage was his own nephew- Surath. Indradyumna requested his nephew to join him in searching his daughter. Ritdhwaj told Surath- "The girl for whom you are doing such austere penance had been taken by me to Saptagodavar. Come with me and I will help you to re-unite with her." All of them then left for Saptagodavar.

In the meantime, as Ghritachi- Devavati's mother arrived at Udaygiri Mountain to where she came across a monkey and enquired if he had seen her daughter. The monkey told the frail looking Ghritachi that he had taken a young woman named Devavati to a hermitage near Srikanth temple. Ghritachi revealed to the monkey that the girl whom he was referring as Devavati was actually her daughter Vedavati. She requested the monkey to help her in locating her lost daughter. Ghritachi proceeded towards river Kaushiki in search of Vedavati followed by the monkey. After reaching there, Ghritachi took a holy dip in the waters of Kaushiki.

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In the meantime, Jabali and Ritdhwaj too had reached the banks of river Kaushiki. When Jabali saw that monkey, he told his father Ritdhwaj by pointing his finger towards that monkey- "This is the same monkey who had enslaved me and tied me up with creepers." Shakuni, the master

archer became furious and sought Ritdhwaj's permission to kill that monkey. Ritdhwaj pacified him by saying- "Bondage is because of your past Karmas, so it is useless to kill this poor monkey."

He then requested the monkey to free his son- Jabali from the weight of the three branches, which were still tied to his body. The monkey opened the knots and Jabali was now absolutely free. Ritdhwaj was pleased and wanting to bless the monkey, said- "You can demand anything from me. I am willing to fulfil any of your wishes." The monkey replied by saying- "O great sage! Didn't you recognise this unfortunate monkey? I am Chitranagada's father whom you had cursed to become a monkey. Bless me that I become liberated from all my sins." Ritdhwaj blessed the monkey and said- "You would be liberated from all your sins, the day you procreate a child from Ghritachi. You would also regain your human body on that day." The monkey became pleased after receiving the blessings.

In course of time, Ghritachi became aware of the monkey's real identity and developed physical intimacy with it. At first, both of them stayed at Kolahal Mountain but later on, they shifted to Vindhya Mountain.

Meanwhile the group of five people- Ritdhwaj, Jabali, Shakuni, Indradyumna and Surath reached Saptagodavar Tirtha. All of them got down from the chariot and took bath in the holy river. The thirsty horses quenched their thirst and satisfied their hunger by grazing on the green grass. After satisfying their hunger, the horses galloped towards Hatkeshwar temple. When Chitrangada, and her companions heard the galloping sound, they climbed on top of the temple and looked all around. Chitrangada saw Ritdhwaj and his companions taking bath and immediately recognised him. Her companion- Nandayanti too recognised Jabali. They were extremely pleased and climbed down from the rooftop of the temple. They worshipped and eulogised Lord Hatkeshwar to express their gratitude.

After sometime, Ritdhwaj and his friends arrived at the temple to worship Lord Hatkeshwar. He recognised Chitrangada and was pleased to meet her. In the meantime, Ghritachi and the monkey also arrived there. Ghritachi was pleased to meet her daughter Vedavati and embraced her. Ritdhwaj instructed the monkey to summon Guhyak from the Anjan Mountain, Kandarmali from the Patal loka and the Gandharva

King Parjanya from heaven respectively.

Guhyak, Kandarmali and Parjanya arrived at the Hatkeshwar temple and all three of them were pleased to meet their respective daughters. Chitrangada accusing herself for her father's turning into a monkey, tried to give up her life. But Ritdhwaj consoled her by saying that her father would regain his human body very soon. Ghritachi too approved his statement and said- "After ten months, I would give birth to a son and on that same day, your father would be liberated from sage Galav's curse and regain his human body."

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After ten months, Ghritachi gave birth to a son who later on became famous as Nala. Vishwakarma became liberated from the curse and regained his human body. Chitrangada was delighted to meet her father. A grand marriage ceremony was organised at Saptagodavar, which was

witnessed by the deities, the Gandharvas and the demons. In this marriage ceremony, sage Galav performed the rituals after which, Jabali was married to Kandamali's daughter, Indradyumna to Vedavati, Shakuni to the Yaksha's daughter and Surath was married to Chitrangada. After the marriage ceremony, everybody returned to their respective places.

After completing this story, King Danda once again requested Araja to accept his proposal. But she was not convinced and said- "Say whatever you like but I will never surrender to your evil intentions."

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SAGE SHUKRACHARYA CURSES DANDA

Prahlada says- "Blinded by lust, Danda forcibly breached the modesty of unrelenting Araja and returned to his palace. Araja was saddened by the

inability to protect her chastity and started wailing.

When Shukracharya returned to his hermitage, he found Araja lying down at the entrance. He asked her about what transpired with her. Araja narrated the whole story, which made Shukracharya extremely furious and his eyes were reddened due to his anger. He thundered-"The wicked Danda would become a pauper after losing his wealth and kingdom within a week." After cursing Danda, he instructed his daughter Araja to do penance so that she could become liberated from her sin and himself went to Patal loka accompanied by his disciples. Shukracharya's curse came true and as a result, Danda lost his whole kingdom within a week.

After narrating this story, Prahlada told Andhak- "On account of the immoral deeds of King Danda, the deities abandoned Dandakarnya and it was now inhabited by the demons. Now it must be clear to you that a person who breaches a chaste woman's modesty against her will is doomed to destruction. Andhak, you must not go ahead with your evil intention of marrying Parvati because she is Lord Shiva's consort whose might is unmatched."

Andhak replied angrily- "I have driven out the deities from heaven. Why should I get scared of Shiva who is fascinated by his wife's beauty?" Prahlada tried his best to convince Andhak against going ahead with his evil plan but it had no effect on him. Andhak ordered his lieutenant Shambar to go to Mandar Mountain and inform Lord Shiva that Parvati should be given to him (Andhak) if he (Lord Shiva) wanted to remain alive. Shambar went to Mandar Mountain with narrated Andhak's desire to Lord Shiva. Hearing this, Goddess Parvati who was sitting besides Lord Shiva told Shambar that she would agree to marry Andhak on the condition that he defeats Lord Shiva in a battle. Shambar returned and narrated everything to Andhak. Now, Andhak's anger crossed all limits and he ordered Duryodhan to prepare for the war. Andhak's huge army was instructed to assemble. The whole atmosphere reverberated with the sound of bugles and war cries. Andhak proceeded towards Mandar Mountain with a huge army, which consisted of mighty warriors like Jambh, Kujambh, Shambar, Virochan, Duryodhan and Vrishparva. Destiny led Andhak towards his own death trap.

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LORD SHIVA PREPARES FOR THE BATTLE GANAS THRONG MANDAR MOUNTAIN

Pulastya says- "When Lord Shiva became aware of Andhak's imminent

attack, he requested Nandi to summon all the Ganas who were more than 700 crores in number. Some of the prominent Ganas like Pashupat, Kalmukh, Mahavrati, Digambar, Maini, Mahapashupat and Vrishabhdhwaj arrived at Mandar Mountain to help Lord Shiva at the request of Nandi.

On seeing the valiant Gana- Pashupat, Lord Shiva embraced him, which surprised all the other Ganas. They were amazed at the special honor given to him. Lord Shiva realised their astonishment and said- "Although all of you have great devotion towards me but in your ignorance, you have shown disrespect towards Lord Vishnu. All of you except Pashupat don't realise that both of us (Lord Shiva and Vishnu) are inseparable and there is no difference between us. Pashupat is aware of this and hence he has been accorded the highest honor." Having said this, Lord Shiva revealed his majestic form of Sadashiva to the Ganas. The Ganas were bewildered on seeing the whole universe existing within Sadashiva. Lord Sadashiva then transformed his appearance into that of Lord Vishnu. The Ganas also viewed the forms of deities like Indra, Surya and Lord Brahma etc. in him. They were now convinced that both Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu were the same. The dawning of this realisation liberated them from their ignorance. Lord Shiva blessed the Ganas and embraced them. All the Ganas then took their position all around Mandar Mountain and readied themselves for the forthcoming attack.

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THE BATTLE COMMENCES

Pulastya says- "When the Ganas saw Andhak's army approaching the Mandar Mountain, they made a loud roar, which reverberated through

the land and sky. Hearing this roar, Lord Ganesha became apprehensive and went to Mandar Mountain to ask Lord Shiva about the origin of that tremendous roar. Lord Shiva told him- "I am going to fight a battle with Andhak." Lord Ganesha also expressed his willingness to accompany him. Lord Shiva then entrusted the job of Parvati's security to prominent Matrikas like Malini, Jaya, Vijaya, Aparajita and Jayanti. He then went to fight Andhak holding his weapon- trident in his hand and mounted on a bull. The Ganas made a protective ring and surrounded him from all sides.

In a very short time, both armies confronted each other and a tremendous battle began in which the Ganas crushed many demons to death. The demons retaliated by attacking them with mace and swords. All the deities assembled in the sky to witness this battle. Mahapashupat attacked the demons with such force that it caused great losses to the enemy. On seeing death and destruction caused in the demon's camp, Tuhunda- the mighty demon attacked the Ganas with his most destructive weapon- Paridhi, which scared the Ganas and they fled. Then Lord Ganesha came forward to fight Tuhunda. Tuhunda assaulted him with his weapon- Paridhi but it fragmented into hundreds of pieces after dashing against Ganesha's belly. On seeing the destruction of his maternal uncle's most destructive weapon, Rahu came running towards Lord Ganesha and held him tightly. Lord Ganesha, Ghatodar and Sukeshi assaulted him simultaneously with their respective weapons. Writhing in pain, Rahu immediately released Ganesha. Seeing the time opportune, Lord Ganesha severed Tuhunda's head with his axe. After killing Tuhunda, Lord Ganesha attacked the demons but the attack was repulsed by the mighty Bali. In this battle, the Ganas were finally able to annihilate the demons. Shambar protected himself by taking Shukracharya's refuge and all the surviving demons including Andhak followed suit.

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SHUKRACHARYA USES SANJIVANI VIDYA

Andhak went to Shukracharya and narrated the woeful tale of demons' defeat. He also requested Shukracharya to help the demons win the

battle. Shukracharya was dejected but he assured the demons that he would make alive, all the dead demons with the help of SanJivani Vidya and really all the mighty demons like Jambh, Kujambh etc. became alive once again.

When Nandi came to know about this unbelievable incident, he went to Lord Shiva and informed him. Lord Shiva instructed him to bring Shukracharya by any means. "I shall control him by my Yogic power", said Lord Shiva. Nandi infiltrated into the demon's army but Hayakandhar spotted him and tried to resist his forward march. Nandi attacked Hayakandhar with his Vajra as a result of which, he fell down unconscious. After this, Kujambh, Jambh and some other demons ran menacingly towards Nandi. They surrounded him from all sides and started assaulting him ruthlessly. On seeing Nandi in danger, Lord Brahma became very worried and instructed the deities to help him.

Indra and all the other deities joined Lord Shiva's army and fought bravely against the demons. The sudden entry of the deities in the battlefield had distracted the attention of the demons and as a result, Nandi got an opportunity to penetrate through the rank and files of demons army. Ultimately, he successfully accomplished his mission and brought Shukracharya to Lord Shiva after abducting him. Lord Shiva wasted no time and swallowed Shukracharya immediately. The next moment, Shukracharya found himself in Lord Shiva's stomach. Shukracharya made frantic efforts to come out of the stomach but was unsuccessful. Being helpless, he started eulogising Lord Shiva. After becoming pleased by Shukracharya's extreme devotion, Lord Shiva expressed his desire to bless him with a boon. Shukracharya requested Lord Shiva to give him a way so that he can come out from his stomach. Lord Shiva agreed and asked him to come out immediately. Shukracharya started searching for an exit point but was amazed by the vastness of Shiva's stomach in which he saw the existence of the whole universe. He made ceaseless effort for one divine year but was unsuccessful in his attempts to come out from Shiva's stomach. At last, he surrendered to the will of Lord Shiva.

Lord Shiva told Shukracharya- "By entering into my stomach, you have become my son. Now, if you want to become free then you should come out through the pore of my Linga." After saying this, Lord Shiva liberated

Shukracharya through his Linga who after being released made salutations to him and joined the demons' army once again. The demons were extremely pleased at his arrival. Once again, a fierce battle took place, which continued for eight divine years. When the demons realised about the deities' supremacy in the battle, they started employing illusionary tactics and swallowed all the Ganas and the deities. The scene of the battlefield, Mandar Mountain became devoid of Ganas and the deities, which made Lord Shiva extremely furious. His extreme anger resulted into the manifestation of Jrimbhayika- a ferocious entity. The mere touch of Jrimbhayika made the demons to yawn. All the deities and the Ganas came out from the opened mouths of the demons. Once again, the battle commenced, which continued for 700 years.

When Andhak realised that Lord Shiva was invincible then he decided to acquire Parvati by deceitful means. He sought the help of one of his most trusted commander, Sunda by saying- "O brave Sunda! You are like my brother. I need your help. The battle has continued for such a long period but has still remained indecisive. I have decided to approach Parvati in the guise of her husband- Shiva and I want you to disguise yourself as Nandi." Sunda agreed to disguise himself in the form of Nandi to help his master.

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Andhak went to Mandar Mountain in the guise of Lord Shiva mounted on Sunda's back who had disguised himself as Nandi. When Parvati saw the injury marks on Shiva's (Andhak's) body, she told her companions- "Look, how grievously the demons have injured my husband! Please

bring the medicinal herbs quickly so that I can dress his wounds." Her companions rushed to bring the medicinal herbs and in the meantime, Parvati started observing the wounds of Shiva (Andhak) minutely. She was surprised to see the absence of both the shoulders on his body. She immediately realised that somebody else had come in the guise of her husband, Shiva. Sensing danger, she ran away to protect herself. Her companions ran behind her and Andhak chased all of them. Parvati and her companions hid behind bushes. Being unable to locate Parvati, Andhak returned to the battlefield and the battle continued.

The deities were fighting valiantly. Lord Vishnu created havoc among the enemy ranks and Lord Brahma sprinkled holy water from his kamandalu, which had increased the strength and power of the deities. Indra attacked the demon- Bala on his head with his Vajra but it was broken into pieces. On seeing the destruction of his weapon, Indra became scared and wanted to flee from the battlefield. Jambh, the demon made fun of him and challenged him for a duel. Indra then requested Lord Vishnu to provide him with a weapon so that he could fight Jambh but Lord Vishnu sent him to Agni. Agni made a replica of his weapon- Shakti and gave it to Indra. Holding his new weapon, Indra then proceeded on his way to fight Jambh mounted on his elephant- Airavat. Jambh assaulted Airavat with such force that Indra started falling down towards the ground.

When the Siddhas and Charanas saw Indra falling down, they provided a magnificent chariot to him so that he could fight with the demons. Meanwhile Indra dashed against the ground with a great thud as a result of which, the earth shook violently.

Sage Shamik's wife thought that the earth was shaking violently due to the impact of earthquake. She requested her husband to carry their son outside the hermitage so that he remains unharmed and said- "The astrologers say that whatever is kept outside home during an earthquake becomes stable." Sage Shamik was very surprised but still followed her instructions. After the shaking of the earth had subsided, Shamik's wife requested him to bring back the child. Sage Shamik went outside and was surprised to find two children instead of one. He came back carrying both the children in his lap and asked his wife as to what made the second child to manifest. She told him that the second child will become the charioteer of Indra and assist him in the battle. This second child was

none other than Matali who acted as the charioteer of Indra during the battle.

Now, Indra had both the chariot and the charioteer in his possession. He went to the battlefield mounted on his new chariot. On the way, he saw a multicoloured bow and arrows lying on the ground. He picked up the weapons and fought valiantly with the demons. He killed many mighty demon warriors. Jambh and Kujambh ran menacingly towards him but Lord Vishnu severed the head of Kujambh with his Sudarshan chakra. Jambh assaulted Indra with his mace but Indra retaliated by attacking with his Shakti as a result of which Jambh was killed. The rest of the demons fled from the battlefield.

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LORD SHIVA KILLS ANDHAK

In spite of death and destruction caused to his army, Andhak still wanted to continue fighting against Lord Shiva's army. He even dismissed the

advises of Shukracharya who wanted a momentary retreat and rebuffed him by saying- "All the deities including Maheshwar and Indra cannot save themselves from my wrath. Very soon, I am going to vanquish them." He then instructed his charioteer to move the chariot towards enemy's position. He shot a volley of arrows, which entirely covered the deities. Lord Vishnu advised the deities to kill Andhak along with his charioteer and destroy the chariot so that Lord Shiva could kill Andhak without any difficulty.

All the deities then attacked the demons with renewed vigour. Lord Vishnu killed thousands of enemy's horses with his mace. Skand killed the charioteer and Vinayak accompanied by the Ganas destroyed Andhak's chariot. After being bereft of his chariot, Andhak attacked the deities with his mace. Seeing the deities in danger, Lord Shiva concealed them within his body and challenged Andhak for a duel. Andhak tried to attack Lord Shiva who was mounted on Nandi. Lord Shiva immediately jumped down from Nandi's back and attacked Andhak with his trident, which pierced his chest. Even after being seriously injured, Andhak did not die instead he pulled Lord Shiva for one mile holding him tightly in his clutch. Lord Shiva tried to resist by attacking for the second time. But Andhak retaliated by hitting Shiva with his mace causing serious injury on his head. A stream of blood oozed out from the wound, which poured down towards all the four directions. The blood stream which poured down towards east resulted into the manifestation of Bhairav named Kalraj. Similarly, Kamaraj, Chakramala, Somaraj, Swachcharaj, Lalitraj and Vighnaraj manifested from the other three directions.

Lord Shiva then lifted Andhak above his head with the help of his trident, which was still pierced in Andhak's chest. His body had become red due to the blood oozing out from Andhak's wound. Lord Shiva had toiled hard to kill Andhak and as a result, he was perspiring profusely. The sweat drops originating from Shiva's forehead resulted into the manifestation of a divine girl while the sweat drops that fell on the ground from Shiva's face resulted into the manifestation of a divine boy. Both the children started gulping down the blood emanating from Andhak's wound. Lord Shiva named the girl child as Charchika while the boy child was named Mangal and blessed both of them. Lord Shiva held Andhak above his head for 1000 divine years, which reduced his body to a skeleton.

At last, Andhak realised his mistake and begged for forgiveness. He eulogised Lord Shiva and hailed his greatness. Lord Shiva told him that he would forgive him only when he accepts Parvati as his mother. Andhak agreed not only to accept Parvati as his mother but also Shiva as his father. Shiva became pleased and lowered down his trident. He healed Andhak's wound by his divine touch. The deities became pleased at Andhak's change of heart and blessed him. Lord Shiva then took Andhak to Mandar Mountain.

Parvati was still hiding behind the bushes. When she saw Lord Shiva approaching, she recognised him and called her companions to come out from their hiding. Lord Shiva gleefully told Parvati that Andhak had now become her slave. "Look at him. He is making salutations to you. Accept him as your son. Andhak then eulogised Parvati with complete devotion. Parvati became pleased and expressed her desire to bless him with a boon. Andhak said- "I don't want anything. I just want to become liberated from all my sins and remain in the proximity of Lord Shiva." Parvati blessed him and made him the Gana of Shiva who became famous as Bhringi.

LORD SHIVA KILLS ANDHAK

In spite of death and destruction caused to his army, Andhak still wanted to continue fighting against Lord Shiva's army. He even dismissed the advises of Shukracharya who wanted a momentary retreat and rebuffed him by saying- "All the deities including Maheshwar and Indra cannot save themselves from my wrath. Very soon, I am going to vanquish them." He then instructed his charioteer to move the chariot towards enemy's position. He shot a volley of arrows, which entirely covered the deities. Lord Vishnu advised the deities to kill Andhak along with his charioteer and destroy the chariot so that Lord Shiva could kill Andhak without any difficulty.

All the deities then attacked the demons with renewed vigour. Lord Vishnu killed thousands of enemy's horses with his mace. Skand killed the charioteer and Vinayak accompanied by the Ganas destroyed Andhak's chariot. After being bereft of his chariot, Andhak attacked the deities with his mace. Seeing the deities in danger, Lord Shiva concealed them within his body and challenged Andhak for a duel. Andhak tried to attack Lord Shiva who was mounted on Nandi. Lord Shiva immediately jumped down from Nandi's back and attacked Andhak with his trident, which pierced his chest. Even after being seriously injured, Andhak did not die instead he pulled Lord Shiva for one mile holding him tightly in his clutch. Lord Shiva tried to resist by attacking for the second time. But Andhak retaliated by hitting Shiva with his mace causing serious injury on his head. A stream of blood oozed out from the wound, which poured down towards all the four directions. The blood stream which poured down towards east resulted into the manifestation of Bhairav named Kalraj. Similarly, Kamaraj, Chakramala, Somaraj, Swachcharaj, Lalitraj and Vighnaraj manifested from the other three directions.

Lord Shiva then lifted Andhak above his head with the help of his trident, which was still pierced in Andhak's chest. His body had become red due to the blood oozing out from Andhak's wound. Lord Shiva had toiled hard to kill Andhak and as a result, he was perspiring profusely. The sweat drops originating from Shiva's forehead resulted into the manifestation of a divine girl while the sweat drops that fell on the ground from Shiva's face resulted into the manifestation of a divine boy. Both the children started gulping down the blood emanating from Andhak's wound. Lord Shiva named the girl child as Charchika while the boy child was named Mangal and blessed both of them. Lord Shiva held Andhak above his head for 1000 divine years, which reduced his body to a skeleton.

At last, Andhak realised his mistake and begged for forgiveness. He eulogised Lord Shiva and hailed his greatness. Lord Shiva told him that he would forgive him only when he accepts Parvati as his mother. Andhak agreed not only to accept Parvati as his mother but also Shiva as his father. Shiva became pleased and lowered down his trident. He healed Andhak's wound by his divine touch. The deities became pleased at Andhak's change of heart and blessed him. Lord Shiva then took Andhak to Mandar Mountain.

Parvati was still hiding behind the bushes. When she saw Lord Shiva approaching, she recognised him and called her companions to come out from their hiding. Lord Shiva gleefully told Parvati that Andhak had now become her slave. "Look at him. He is making salutations to you. Accept him as your son. Andhak then eulogised Parvati with complete devotion. Parvati became pleased and expressed her desire to bless him with a boon. Andhak said- "I don't want anything. I just want to become liberated from all my sins and remain in the proximity of Lord Shiva." Parvati blessed him and made him the Gana of Shiva who became famous as Bhringi.

THE ORIGIN OF MARUT GANAS

Narada asked Pulastya about the battle which Indra fought with the demon at Malay Mountain. Pulastya replied- "Andhak's followers- Maya

and Tar tried to enter Patal loka after being defeated by the deities. While they were passing close to the Malay Mountain, they decided to live there being enchanted by its natural beauty. The caves of Malay Mountain were inhabited by sages who were Lord Shiva's devotees. The demons started causing obstacles in the rituals performed by the sages. When Lord Shiva came to know about this, he instructed Indra to go to Malay Mountain and help the sages. Indra went to Malay Mountain and successfully drove out the demons from there.

Narada again asked Pulastya as to why Indra was also known as Gotrabhit. Pulastya narrated the following tale- "After her son's death, Diti requested her husband, Kashyapa to bless her with another son so that Indra could be killed. Sage Kashyapa advised her that she would get her desire fulfilled after the successful accomplishment of her penance lasting for 100 divine years. In course of time, Diti became pregnant. One day, sage Kashyapa left for Udaygiri Mountain to do his penance and Diti was left all alone.

One day, Indra arrived at the hermitage and expressed his desire to be at Diti's service if she permitted. Diti gave permission and Indra engaged himself in serving her. He used to keep the oblation site clean and bring dry wood necessary for the performance of Yagya. This continued for 1000 divine years. One day, Diti was taking rest after her bath. She had postponed her penance for sometime because of her impurity. As she was tired, very soon, she fell asleep. Seeing the moment opportune, Indra entered into her womb through her nostrils and cut the foetus into seven parts. After waking up, Diti realised about her foetus' destruction. Indra was very scared on the prospect of being cursed by Diti and said- "I am not the cause of your foetus' destruction. It has been destroyed due to your own impurity. So please don't curse me." Diti replied- "You are certainly not responsible for my foetus' destruction. It was all in my destiny. From the pieces of the foetus manifested the Marut Ganas and since Indra had tried to harm his own uterine brothers therefore he became famous as Gotrabhit.

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MARUT GANAS OF DIFFERENT MANVANTARAS

Sage Pulastya says- "O Narada! Now, I am going to describe about the origin of Marut Ganas of various Manvantaras. Savan was Swayambhu

Manu's son. He had no sons and when he died, the sorrowful queen-Sudeva heard a heavenly voice, which instructed her to give up her life by jumping into the burning pyre." "You would become a proud mother of seven sons", said the heavenly voice. The queen acted accordingly and died after jumping into the burning pyre."

"The souls of the dead king and queen ascended towards the sky. The prophesies made by the heavenly voice came true and Sudeva found herself in her periods. The king enjoyed a physical relationship with the queen for five days. Incidentally, few drops of sperms fell towards earth. After this both the souls departed towards Brahma loka. These falling drops of sperms were gathered by the wives of some sages and stored in a lotus flower. Those women were Samana, Nalini, Vayushmati, Chitra, Vishakha, Harita and Alini. They mistook the sperms for ambrosia and drank it after getting permission from their husbands. But after drinking it, they became devoid of their effulgence and were abandoned by their respective husbands. In course of time, they gave birth to seven sons who became famous as Adya Maruts during Swayambhu Manvantara."

After having described about the Marut Ganas, sage Pulastya went on to describe about Swarochish Manvantara- "Kratudhwaj was the son of Swarochish Manu. He had seven sons. All of them went to Meru Mountain to do penance as they were desirous of Indra's kingdom. Indra being scared instructed Putna to create hurdles in their penance so that Kratudhwaj's sons wishes remained unfulfilled."

"Putna went to the place where Kratudhwaj's sons were doing penance. There was a river nearby where Kratudhwaj's sons arrived one day to bathe. Acting according to her plan, Putna too entered into the river to take bath. Kratudhwaj's sons were infatuated by her divine beauty. They could not control themselves and as a result, they had an ejaculation. Putna was successful in accomplishing her mission of corrupting the thoughts of Kratudhwaj's sons, who after realising that their penance had gone in vain returned to their father's kingdom. The released sperms of Kratudhwaj's sons was swallowed by a fish named Shankhini. One day, she was caught by a fisherman and presented to Kratudhwaj's sons, who again released her into a nearby pond. In course of time, Shankhini died after giving birth to seven young fish. The seven young fish started crying at their mother's death. Lord Brahma appeared and advised them not to

cry and for this reason, they were called Marut. Lord Brahma blessed them by saying- "All of you would attain the status of deities and would be capable of flying in the air." After finishing his story, sage Pulastya told Narada that this was how Marut Ganas originated during Swarochish Manvantara.

Sage Pulastya says- "Now, I am going to describe about the Marut Ganas of Uttam Manvantara. Jyotishman was the son of Vayushman and his wife was the daughter of sage Brihaspati. As they were sonless, both of them decided to do penance to beget a son. The Saptarishis arrived there and enquired as to why they were doing such a severe penance. Jyotishman's wife told the Saptarishis that they were desirous of a son. The Saptarishis blessed her by saying that she would become a mother of seven sons. In course of time, Jyotishman's wife became pregnant. One fateful day, Jyotishman passed away. His sorrowful wife wanted to commit Sati. While he was sitting on the burning pyre, suddenly, a piece of burning flesh fell into the nearby river and got fragmented into seven pieces. Seven Marut Ganas manifested from these seven pieces of flesh."

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Sage Pulastya says- "During Tamas Manvantara, Ritdhwaj, the son of Tamas Manu did a severe penance with the desire of getting a son. He made offerings of his own flesh, blood and sperms to the oblation fire. Suddenly, he heard a heavenly voice instructing him not to make

offerings of his sperms. But the king continued with his offering and as a result, he died. After sometime, seven infants manifested from the oblation fire who later on became famous as the Marut Ganas of Tamas Manvantara."

King Ripujeet was the descendant of Raivat. He was sonless and after being pleased by his extreme devotion, the deity Sun had blessed him with a daughter named Surati. In course of time, she grew into a beautiful woman. One day, Ripujeet passed away and a grieved Surati decided to give up her life. The Saptarishis arrived there and they were so infatuated by her beauty that they tried to prevent her from doing so. But unrelenting Surati did not listen and gave up her life by jumping into the burning pyre. The sorrowful Saptarishis went away after casting lusty glances on her. Seven infants manifested from the burning pyre, who became famous as Marut Ganas of Raivat Manvantara.

During Chakshush Manvantara, a sage named Manki did a tremendous penance at the banks of Saptasaraswat. But he fell down from grace after being infatuated by the beauty of an Apsara named Vapu. His sperms ejaculated and fell into the Saptasaraswat river from which manifested the seven Marut Ganas.

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LORD VISHNU KILLS KALNEMI

After hearing the news of Bali's coronation, Maya and some other demons went and advised Bali to avenge the killings of his father-

Virochan and other relatives by Indra. Bali became furious and marched with a huge army to fight the deities.

When Indra heard this news, he started making preparations for the battle and very soon, the deities' army assembled at the foothills of Udyachal Mountain. A fierce battle was fought between both the armies. The movement of the troops covered the whole sky with dust which subsided only after the tremendous bloodbath wetted the earth with blood. Kartikeya fought valiantly in this battle and killed many demons. The demons too retaliated by vigorously attacking the deities. Lord Vishnu created havoc in the demons' army by killing many demons in a very short time.

When Kalnemi- the demon saw that his comrades were scared of fighting Lord Vishnu, he attacked the deities with renewed vigour and swallowed many of the Yakshas, Kinnars and the deities. The deities became scared and started running away from the battlefield. The demons became delighted considering it as their victory and the defeat of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu became furious and covered the Udyachal Mountain with a volley of arrows named Narach. Bali and Maya became terrified and instigated Kalnemi to fight against Lord Vishnu.

Kalnemi confronted Lord Vishnu with a mace but it was destroyed by Vishnu's chakra. After destroying Kalnemi's weapon. Lord Vishnu first severed both his hands and then his head. The news of Kalnemi's death spread like a wildfire in the demons army and they fled from the battlefield.

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KING BALI

BALI RULES THE HEAVEN

The mighty Banasura saw the demons running away from the battlefield and came to their rescue. The arrival of Banasura boosted the morale of the defeated demons and they returned to fight the deities.

Lord Vishnu advised the deities to fight gallantly and disappeared from the battlefield. Shukracharya assured the demons of their victory because he thought that the deities would be no match forthe demons might in the absence of Lord Vishnu.

Once again, a fierce battle commenced. Bali attacked the deities ferociously with his mace. Banasura devastated the deities' army with his thousand hands. Ultimately, the deities were defeated in this battle and the heaven came under the control of demons. The defeated deities took refuge in Brahma loka after abandoning the heaven. Bali ruled the heaven with the help of his relatives.

One day, Bali called his father- Prahlada to heaven and requested him to become the ruler of heaven but Prahlada refused by saying- "As I have chosen the path of Yoga after relinquishing everything, it would not be proper for me to get attached to worldly matters once again. Since you have snatched heaven from the deities on account of your valiance, hence the heaven belongs to you." Bali requested Prahlada to enlighten him on the duties of a king and on the virtuous deeds which would enable him in attaining Dharma, Arth, Kama and Moksha.

Prahlada advised Bali to rule in a just manner and for the benediction of the world. He also advised Bali to engage himself in the service of all the three castes so that they remain loyal to him. Prahlada said- "Virtuosity increases when people unwaveringly follow their Dharma. Increase in virtuosity helps a king to rule without any problem."

Bali agreed to rule in a just manner as per the advice of Prahlada.

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THE SPLENDOURS OF BALI

Pulastya says- "The just rule of Bali had transformed the Kali Yuga into Satya Yuga. Even his subjects engaged themselves in virtuous activities

like penance and Yagyas. They practised nonviolence and always spoke the truth. One day, Goddess Trailokya Lakshmi went to Bali and said- "I have come to bless you because you are a victorious king. You have even defeated Indra and have control over all the three worlds." After saying this, Goddess Lakshmi entered into the body of Bali.

During the reign of Bali, his subjects were happy and prosperous. Nobody experienced the pangs of hunger and everybody's desire was fulfilled. The prominence of virtuosity and religiousness during Bali's rule was incomparable and prosperity prevailed throughout his kingdom.

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MYTHOLOGICAL TALES

DHUNDHU PERFORMS ASHWAMEDHA YAGYA

Pulastya says- "During his pilgrimage, Prahlada visited many sacred places like Manas Tirtha, Kaushiki, Devahnad and Hastinapur etc. At last he reached the bank of river Yamuna where he worshipped Lord Trivikrama (Vamana)." Narada was surprised at the mention of Vamana's name and asked Pulastya-"Lord Vishnu is still to take Vamana incarnation then how come Prahlada visited his temple? Pulastya says- "Sage Kashyapa had an Aurasputra named Dhundhu. Lord Brahma had blessed Dhundhuof immortality. In course of time, Dhundhu defeated the deities and drove them out from heaven as a result of which, they had to take refuge in Brahma loka.

When Dhundhu came to know that the deities were living in Brahma loka, he decided to attack Brahma loka. He consulted the demons but they told him that it was impossible for them to reach Brahma loka. Sage Shukracharya said- "Indra had accomplished 100 Ashwamedha Yagyas by the virtue of which, he could go to Brahma loka. If you are desirous of reaching Brahma loka then you too will have to perform Ashwamedha Yagya." Dhundhu expressed his willingness to perform Ashwamedha Yagya.

Shukracharya started making preparations for Ashwamedha Yagya at the bank of river Devika. He appointed his disciples and some other sages belonging to Bhargava's clan to supervise the Yagya ceremony. The Ashwamedha Yagya commenced and a horse was let loose according to the tradition.

When the deities came to know about this Ashwamedha Yagya being performed by Dhundhu, they were scared and requested Lord Vishnu to disrupt the Yagya so that Dhundhu could not reach Brahma loka. Lord Vishnu assured the deities and went to the site where Dhundhu was performing Ashwamedha Yagya in a dwarf appearance. He entered into the Devika River and started drowning according to his plan.

When the demons saw the dwarf (Lord Vishnu) drowning, they rushed to save him. After taking him out from the river, they asked him about his identity. The dwarf said- "I am the youngest son of Prabhas. My name is Gatibhas and my elder brother is Netrabhas. After our father's death, my elder brother did not give me my due share in the property. When I insisted, he flung me into this river."

The Brahmins who were performing the Yagya requested Dhundhu to donate wealth to Gatibhas. Dhundhu agreed and said- "I am willing to fulfil all your wishes. Demand anything you like. Gatibhas demanded a small piece of land measured by three steps. Lord Vishnu then revealed his giant appearance and covered the whole earth with his first step. His second step covered the heaven and there was no place left for his third step. Lord Vishnu became furious and put his third step on the back of Dhundhu as a result of which he was crushed to death. A large pit measuring 1000 Yojans was created due to the impact of his weight and Lord Vishnu threw Dhundhu's dead body in that pit."

After completing his story, Pulastya told Narada- "This is how Lord Vishnu became Trivi kr ama for the first time to defeat the evil designs of Dhundhu. Prahlada paid a visit to the temple of Vamana situated at the place where Dhundhu was killed.

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The Brahmins who were performing the Yagya requested Dhundhu to donate wealth to Gatibhas. Dhundhu agreed and said- "I am willing to fulfil all your wishes. Demand anything you like. Gatibhas demanded a small piece of land measured by three steps. Lord Vishnu then revealed his giant appearance and covered the whole earth with his first step. His second step covered the heaven and there was no place left for his third step. Lord Vishnu became furious and put his third step on the back of Dhundhu as a result of which he was crushed to death. A large pit measuring 1000 Yojans was created due to the impact of his weight and Lord Vishnu threw Dhundhu's dead body in that pit."

After completing his story, Pulastya told Narada- "This is how Lord Vishnu became Trivikrama for the first time to defeat the evil designs of Dhundhu. Prahlada paid a visit to the temple of Vamana situated at the place where Dhundhu was killed.

PURURAVA REGAINS HIS GOOD LOOKS

Pulastya says- "After worshipping Lord Trivikrama, Prahlada went to Lingabhedak Mountain and worshipped Lord Shankar. He also visited

many more sacred places like Kedar Tirtha, Badrikashrama, Bhadrakama and Vipasha. At last, he reached Irawati and worshipped that Almighty Lord with whose blessings, Pururava was able to regain his good looks." Narada was curious to know this story.

Pulastya says- "Once upon a time, there lived a rich trader named Sudharma. Once, while passing through the Surashtra desert, he was attacked by bandits and robbed of all his possessions. Dejected, he started wandering in the desert like a lunatic. He saw a Shami tree and decided to take rest under its shade. On this tree lived numerous ghosts. On seeing Sudharma, the leader of the ghosts asked him as to where he was going. Sudharma narrated his woeful tale which made the ghosts very sad. The leader of the ghosts said- You must not lose heart. If you are destined to possess wealth then you would become wealthy once again but worrying about your lost wealth will only have ill effects on your health and you would become weak. On being instructed by their leader, the ghosts offered food to the hungry Sudharma. After satiating his hunger, Sudharma asked the leader of the ghosts- Who are you? How could you provide me such a delicious dish in this deserted forest? The leader of the ghosts said- "In my previous birth, I was a Brahmin and my name was Somasharma. I was very poor but my neighbour Somashrava was a rich and prosperous trader. Being a poor Brahmin, I was not able to perform my religious duties. Once, people of all castes thronged Irawati and Nadvala to take a holy dip on the auspicious occasion of Shravana Dwadashi. I followed them and after taking my bath, performed all the necessary rituals. As I was poor, I could donate things of little importance like umbrella, shoes, sweets, curds etc. This was the first and the last time, I had donated anything in my life. After my death, I became a ghost. My companions also never donated anything in their previous life. The delicious food which you had relished just now was due to the virtue of food items donated in my previous life. This Shami tree is due to the virtue of donating umbrella."

Somasharma was surprised and asked the leader of the ghosts whether he could be of any help to him to which the leader requested him to offer Pind Dan at Gaya so that he became liberated from Preta Yoni. Somasharma went to Gaya and performed the necessary rituals of Pind Dan as a result of which, the ghosts went to Brahma loka after being liberated.

Somasharma continued to observe the fast of Shravana Dwadashi every year. One fateful day, he passed away and was reborn in a royal family. After reaching youth age, he became the king of Shakal Puri and indulged in enjoyments and sensual pleasures. After his death, he was born in a Brahmin family. Though ugly, he was well versed in all the scriptures. After a few years, he got married. His wife would make fun of his ugly looks which annoyed him. He went to Irawati and worshipped Lord Jagannath with full devotion. Lord Jagannath blessed him and his ugly looks turned into a handsome appearance. He enjoyed a very satisfied married life and after his death was reborn as King Pururava.

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THE DESCRIPTION OF NAKSHATRA PURUSHA

Sage Narada asks Pulastya about the austerity named Nakshatra Purusha which King Pururava had accomplished to please Lord Vishnu. Pulastya

says- "All the constellations dwell in different parts of Lord Vishnu's body. The Mula Nakshatra dwells in his feet, Rohini Nakshatra in his thighs, Ashwini in his knees, Purvashadha and Uttarashadha in his chest etc. A devotee who worships Lord Vishnu- the possessor of all the constellations methodically and according to the rituals attains liberation. Worshipping Lord Vishnu's different organs helps in attaining good health and a disease free life. Being pleased by this austerity, Lord Vishnu bestows radiance and sweet voice to the devotee. Arundhati had achieved great acclamation due to the successful accomplishment of this austerity. Aditya with a desire of a son had his wish fulfilled in the form of Revant, his famous son. The Apsaras Rambha and Menaka had acquired unparalleled beauty and sweet voice respectively after successful accomplishment of this austerity. Similarly, Chandra had attained supreme radiance and Pururava regained his kingdom. This way, whoever performed this austerity, his desire was fulfilled.

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PRAHLADA'S PILGRIMAGE

Pulastya says- "Prahlada went to the sacred place called Rishikanya and took a holy dip in the Irawati River. After that, he worshipped Lord

Janardan in the temple situated nearby and then proceeded on his journey towards Kurukshetra. After reaching there, he worshipped Lord Kurudhwaj and paid a visit Lord Narsimha temple. After taking a holy dip in the river Devika, he proceeded on towards Gokama Tirtha where he took bath in river Prachi and worshipped Lord Vishwakarma. Ultimately after visiting numerous sacred places, he reached Madhunandini where he worshipped Lord Shiva who had a chakra in his hands and Lord Vishnu possessing a trident."

Narada was surprised and asked Pulastya why Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu had held Sudarshan chakra and trident respectively. Pulastya explained- "During ancient times, there was a mighty demon king named Jalodbhav. He had pleased Lord Brahma by his severe penance and was blessed by him to become immortal. After receiving the boon, Jalodbhav became arrogant and started tormenting the deities and the sages. The deities sought the refuge of Lord Vishnu. They accompanied Lord Vishnu to Himalaya Mountain to meet Lord Shiva. Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva exchanged their weapons. Both of them went to kill the demon who on seeing them got scared and hid in a nearby river. Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva waited eagerly for him on the opposite banks of the river."

"After sometime, Jalodbhav came out of the river thinking that both of them must have departed by now. He climbed up the Himalaya Mountain and both the deities chased him. Lord Shiva attacked him with his chakra while Lord Vishnu pierced his trident in his chest. Jalodbhav died and fell down from the Himalaya Mountain." After finishing his story, Pulastya says- "This was the reason why both Lord Vishnu and Lord Shankar had exchanged their weapons. The spot where Lord Shankar had kept his foot resulted into the manifestation of river Vitasta. Prahlada after worshipping Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva at Madhunandini went to Bhrigutung Tirtha situated on the Himalaya Mountain."

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TALES OF UPAMANYU AND SRIDAMA

Sage Narada was still not satisfied by Pulastya's explanation and asked Pulastya as to what compelled Lord Vishnu to give his chakra to Lord

Shiva. Pulastya says- "There used to live a learned Brahmin named Veetmanyu. He was well versed in all the Vedas and other scriptures. His wife's name was Atreyi and Upamanyu was his son. Inspite of his knowledge, Veetmanyu lived in absolute poverty and found it difficult to make arrangements for daily necessities. One day, young Upamanyu on being hungry started crying. His helpless mother consoled him by saying that if he worshipped Lord Shiva then he would even get nectar and would get liberated from the pangs of hunger for ever. Veetmanyu was surprised and asked as to who this Lord Virupaksh was. Atreyi narrated the following story- During ancient times, there was a demon king named Sridama. He ruled over the whole earth. Once, he decided to snatch the Srivatsa-Lord Vishnu's dearest ornament from him. When Lord Vishnu came to know about his intention, he became furious but since he had no weapon at his disposal he went to take Lord Shiva's help in this regard. Lord Shiva gave Sudarshan chakra to him and said that with the help of that infallible weapon, he could kill anybody. But Lord Vishnu was not convinced about the weapon's destructive power and expressed his desire to test it on Lord Shiva himself. Lord Shiva agreed and Vishnu released the Sudarshan chakra towards him. As a result, Lord Shiva's body was severed into three parts- Vishvesh, Yagyesh and Yagyayajak. Now, Lord Vishnu became satisfied and made salutations to Lord Shiva to express his gratitude."

"Lord Vishnu went to the mountain where the demon Sridama lived and severed his head with the Sudarshan chakra. After killing the demon, Lord Vishnu returned to his abode- Ksheersagar." After finishing her story, Atreyi told Upamanyu that such was the greatness of Lord Virupaksh. Upamanyu did a severe penance to please Lord Virupaksh and was blessed by him as a result of which, he never felt hungry in his life.

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GAJENDRA AND THE CROCODILE

Sage Narada requests Pulastya to describe how Gajendra managed to release itself from the jaws of the crocodile. Pulastya says- "There lived a

crocodile in a reservoir near Trikut Mountain. One day, a thirsty elephant arrived there to quench its thirst. The wicked crocodile caught hold of the elephant's leg and dragged it towards the middle of the reservoir. The elephant tried its best to release itself from the crocodile's jaws but was unsuccessful. Being helpless, it started remembering Lord Sri Hari as it was his great devotee. It picked up a lotus flower and chanted the following stotra- 'Salutations to that Lord Vishnu who is the originator of this universe. Salutations to the omnipresent Lord Vishnu who is revered by the sages. I take the refuge of Lord Vishnu who is also known by the names of Vishveshvar, Sri Hari and Sanatan Purusha.' This way, the elephant eulogised Lord Vishnu with great devotion.

Pleased by his devotion, Lord Vishnu killed the wicked crocodile with his Sudarshan chakra and liberated the elephant. Actually, this crocodile was none other than Gandharva Huhu who had attained the form of a crocodile after being cursed by sage Deval. He was liberated from the curse and went to heaven. Lord Vishnu touched the elephant and it got transformed into a divine human being. This way, with the blessings of Lord Vishnu, both of them were liberated.

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THE GREATNESS OF SARASWAT STOTRA

Sage Pulastya says- "There lived a Kshatriya who kept enemity towards Brahmins. After his death, he was reborn as a demon and spent his life

indulging in nefarious activities. Once he saw a hermit doing penance. He wanted to devour him but was unsuccessful in his attempt as the hermit had protected himself by chanting Vishnupanjar stotra. So, he waited for the hermit for four months to come out from his meditative trance. After the completion of his meditation, the hermit was surprised to see a weak and frail demon waiting for him. He asked the demon about his identity and the purpose for which he was waiting there. The demon told him that although he had come with the intention of devouring him, he was unsuccessful in his attempt as he (hermit) was well protected by Vishnupanjar stotra. "I am very impressed by your spiritual feats and I am desirous of learning the same from you. I have committed many sins in my life, so tell me how to become liberated from them", asked the demon. But the hermit was not convinced and told the demon that he would never preach a demon. He advised the demon to take help of some other Brahmin. The demon went in search of another Brahmin. One day, he saw a Brahmin doing penance and caught hold of him. The Brahmin was frightened and requested the demon- "Wait until I return after giving this fruit to my teacher." But the demon thought that the Brahmin was trying to escape hence he did not allow the Brahmin to leave. The worried Brahmin went near a burning fire and pleaded for help. Suddenly, Goddess Saraswati manifested herself and told the Brahmins- "Don't be afraid. With my blessings, you would be able to narrate the means for the demon's benediction." After blessing the Brahmin, Goddess Saraswati disappeared.

The Brahmin narrated the Saraswat stotra to the demon- You must chant the following stotra thrice in a day- 'I make salutations to Lord Hari who is also known as Krishna, Hrishikesh, Vasudev, Janardan and Jagannath. May he liberate me from my sins. I make salutations to Lord Vishnu who rests on Sheshnag and who hails Shankchakra Gada and chakra in his hands, may he liberate me from my sins. Lord Vishnu who manifests himself in each individual soul just like the element of fire manifests itself in a piece of wood. May he liberate me from my sins.'

The Brahmin told the demon that the daily chanting of Saraswat Vishnu stotra would enable him to get liberated from his sins. The demon was pleased and after releasing the Brahmin went to a place called Shalgram. He engaged himself in severe penance and started chanting the stotra taught by the Brahmin. Ultimately, he was successful in becoming

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BALI PERFORMS ASWHAMEDHA YAGYA

BALI'S ARRIVAL AT KURUKSHETRA

Pulastya says- "After the departure of Prahlada on his pilgrimage, Bali desirous of performing a Yagya went to Kurukshetra. Shukracharya had invited the descendants of sage Bhargava to supervise the proceedings of Ashwamedha Yagya but his decision was not approved by the descendants of some other sages like Atri, Gautam, Kaushik and Angira. As a result, all of them left Kurukshetra.

After their departure, Shukracharya started making preparations for the Yagya and initiated both Bali and his wife- Vindhyavali into the rituals. After that, a horse was let loose according to the tradition. The demon Tarkaksh followed that horse. The Ashwamedha Yagya continued for three months after which, Aditi gave birth to a child who was dwarfish in size at a time when the Sun had juts entered the zodiac of Gemini. All the deities and sages including Lord Brahma were extremely pleased by Lord Vamana's birth. They went to Aditi's hermitage and eulogised Lord Vamana. Lord Vamana became pleased by their eulogy and requested Lord Brahma to help perform his consecrations. On being instructed by Lord Brahma, sage Bharadwaj performed Vamana's Jat karma and Yagyopavit. After that, sage Bharadwaj taught him Vedas and other scriptures which was mastered by Vamana in less than one month. After finishing his studies, Lord Vamana sought his Guru's permission to go to Kurukshetra. Sage Bharadwaj expressed his inability by saying- "How can a mortal like me give permission to the supreme lord? If you want to go to Kurukshetra then how can I stop you from going there? I have some queries regarding your various abodes and would you be gracious enough to enlighten me on that?"

Lord Vamana said- "The whole universe including the sky, earth, ocean, mountains, clouds are pervaded by my existence. All the deities, sages, living and non-living things have manifested from me. When I took my first incarnation of Matsya I had my abode in the holy waters of Manas Sarovar. As my second incarnation of tortoise, I had my abode in the holy waters of Kaushiki River. I had my abode at Hastinapur when I took my incarnation as Govind. As Narayan, I had my abode at Badrikashrama, as Jayesh, I had my abode at Bhadrakarna." This way, Lord Vamana described about his different abodes in great detail.

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ARRIVAL OF LORD VAMANA AT KURUKSHETRA

Pulastya says- "After satisfying Bharadwaj's curiosity about his different abodes, Lord Vamana left for Kurukshetra where Bali was busy

performing his Yagya. As soon as Lord Vamana reached Kurukshetra, the whole earth started shaking violently and high tides rose in the ocean. Being frightened of Lord Vishnu, Agni did not accept the offerings made by Bali. Bali was very surprised by all these sudden developments. He asked Shukracharya about the reason for all these strange happenings."

Shukracharya replied- "O king of the demons! Definitely, all these strange happenings signifies the arrival of Lord Vasudev." Bali then asked Shukracharya as to what was the most appropriate way of honoring his eminent guest. "What donations should I make to him so that he is pleased and satisfied?", asked Bali. Shukracharya warned him by saying- "Forget about donating anything otherwise you will get into serious trouble." Bali told him that he would not disgrace himself by refusing to meet the demands made by Vasudev. "The way a man behaves in his speech, action and thoughts is the result of his past karmas. Are you not aware of the incident related with Koshkar which happened at Malay Mountain? Koshkar was the son of sage Mudgal. He was famous for his austerities and his wife too was very virtuous. In course of time, a son was born to them but alas he was blind and deaf. Koshkar's wife abandoned that child in front of her house. Incidentally, an ogress named Surpakshi happened to arrive there and after seeing the abandoned child, exchanged him with her own child. She carried Koshkar's child to Shalodar Mountain with the intention of devouring him. When her husband came to know about the incident, he reprimanded Surpakshi for her misdeed. The demon warned the ogress that both of them would be cursed by the Brahmin and advised her to keep the child at the same place from where she had brought him."

In the meantime, Koshkar came out from his hermitage after hearing the cries of Surpakshi's child. He was surprised to find some other child instead of his own and told his wife- "It seems that this child is under the influence of a ghost." After saying this, he protected the child by demarcating a round circle initiated with mantra around him. Right then, the ogress arrived and after keeping the Brahmin's child on the ground wanted to take back her own child. But she could not enter inside that circle. Koshkar took his child in his lap and went inside the hermitage. This way, the ogress returned to the mountain without her child.

Koshkar brought up both the children with great care. He named the

ogress's child as Diwakar while his own son was named Nisachar. As destiny would have liked it, Diwakar turned out to be a very studious child and became well versed in Vedas within a very short time whereas Nisachar was not interested in studies and had a bad habit of criticising everybody. Koshkar became furious and threw Nisachar in a well. There was a Amla tree inside that well and the child survived living on its fruits. This way, ten years passed and one day, Koshkar's wife arrived at the well to fetch water. On seeing his mother, Nisachar tried to convince her that he was her son but she was not convinced. He then accompanied his mother back home and narrated the reason why he had taken birth as a deaf and blind child. "In my previous birth, I was the son of Vrishakapi and was very famous for my scholarly traits. In due course of time, I became very arrogant and started indulging in all sorts of evil deeds. After my death, I went to Raurav Narak and suffered all the tortures over there. I was reborn as a tiger and after being enslaved by a king, I was kept inside a cage. Once, the king had gone out and the beautiful queen arrived near the cage.

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I was infatuated by her beauty and expressed my lusty desires to her. She was taken aback by my proposal and said- "How can physical relationship be possible between us?" But I requested her to release me by opening the cage door. The queen opened the door and I became free. I caught hold of

her and tried to satiate my lust but right then the guards arrived there and killed me. Once again I went to the hell and after suffering the pains I was reborn as an ass. My master was Agniveshya, a Brahmin. Once, his wife- Sumati wanted to go to her father's house. Agniveshya advised her to go riding on my back and instructed his servant to escort us. While on our journey, we reached a river and Sumati expressed her desire to take bath. She went to take bath and I waited for her to return. While she was taking her bath, I became infatuated by her beauty and caught hold of her. The servant who was escorting us saw this and became angry. He killed me by hitting with his stick. Once again, I went to hell and was reborn as a parrot. A wicked fowler trapped and sold me to a trader's son. Although I lived a luxurious life, yet I was not happy because of my slavery. Once, his daughter arrived near my cage and playfully kept me on her breasts. I became infatuated and tried to have physical relations with her. But I was suffocated to death after getting entangled in her necklace. Once again, I went to hell and after suffering the tortures, was reborn as a bull. My master was a Chandala and I used to pull his cart. Once, his wife was sitting in the cart I was pulling. Unmindful of her surroundings, she was singing songs in a beautiful voice. After listening to her melodious voice, I became infatuated and tried to have physical relations with her. I turned back but the noose around my neck became tight and I was suffocated to death. Once again I went to hell and after suffering the pains, was reborn as a blind and deaf son to you. I remember all my previous lives and I am aware that my physical disabilities are only because of my past sins. I have decided to atone for all my sins by doing penance and indulging in virtuous deeds. After saying this, he went to Badrikashrama to do penance.

After finishing his story, Bali told Shukracharya that a man inherits his qualities from his past life and it is impossible for him to change them. "It is applicable to both good and bad qualities. My penance, virtuosity, benevolence and generosity have been inherited from my past life and come what may, I have decided not to shun them."

Pulastya says- "This way, Bali remained firm in his resolve to meet any demand made by his esteemed guest and started waiting eagerly for his arrival."

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LORD VAMANA'S DEMANDS

Bali was pleased that he would get an opportunity to see the Almighty God whom the sages contemplate upon. He was proud of his good fortune

that the lord was paying him a visit. Shukracharya aware of the reason for Vamana's arrival warned Bali against making any promise to him. Bali replied- "How can I refuse if the Almighty God demands anything from me? I am willing to face any hardship to safeguard my benevolent image. I don't mind if the deities get benefited by my actions. Even if the lord is coming with the intention of killing me, I am not scared as that is how I would attain salvation. Come what may, I am not going to abandon my charitable nature."

As the conversation between Shukracharya and Bali continued, suddenly, Lord Vamana arrived at the site. Vamana's radiance subdued the power of all demons present there. Lord Vamana being impressed by the grandeur of Vamana's Yagya complimented him for organising such a magnificent Yagya. Bali eulogised and worshipped his esteemed guest. He requested Vamana to reveal the reason of his arrival and promised that his wishes would be fulfilled. Lord Vamana smiled and told him that he needed a small piece of land measured by three steps for the performance of Yagya. Bali was surprised by this demand and requested him to ask for more land but Lord Vamana told him that he needed only that much land.

Bali agreed and took a vow to donate a piece of land measured by three steps. Hardly had Bali taken his vow, when suddenly Lord Vamana expanded his size. His first step covered the whole earth. By his two successive steps, he covered the two worlds. This way, Bali was forced to donate all the three worlds according to his vow. Lord Vishnu then made Indra, the king of all the three worlds and sent Bali to the nether world named Sutal. He blessed Bali by saying- "You would enjoy a long life till the end of this present Kalpa. You would hold the post of Indra till the arrival of Savami Manavantar. As long as you remain supportive of the Brahmins and the deities, you would enjoy all the pleasures of life. But if you go against their wishes then you would be fastened by Varuna's noose." After saying this, Lord Vishnu disappeared.

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LORD BRAHMA WORSHIPS LORD VAMANA

Narada asked sage Pulastya as to where did Lord Vamana go after disappearing from the oblation site. Pulastya replied- "Lord Vamana went

to Brahma loka mounted on his Garuda. On seeing him, Lord Brahma gave a warm reception and after worshipping him asked about the reason for his sudden arrival. Lord Vamana told him that he had sent Bali to Sutal loka for the welfare of the deities and so that they could get their share of the Yagya. Lord Brahma expressed his desire to see the giant form of Vishnu which he had taken while measuring all the three worlds. Lord Vishnu obliged him and showed his giant appearance. Lord Brahma was impressed and eulogised him. He requested Lord Vishnu to remain in Brahma loka in his appearance of Vamana. Lord Vishnu had agreed to do this and remained there.

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BALI LIVES IN PATAL LOKA

Pulastya says- After reaching the nether world, Bali got constructed a beautiful city made of diamonds and other precious stones. Vishwakarma

had constructed an enormous sized altar in the central part of the city. The windows of Bali's palace were well decorated with pearls. Bali lived there in luxury and by enjoying all the pleasures of life.

One day, while the demons were engaged in their sensual pleasures, suddenly the fearsome Sudarshan chakra entered Bali's palace and after making the demons bereft of their radiance went back to Lord Vishnu. Bali was very worried and thought that only his grandfather Prahlada could help him out from this situation. On being remembered by Bali, Prahlada appeared before him. Bali requested him to describe the means which would be benedictory to him. Prahlada was pleasantly surprised by his change of heart and said- "At last, you have realised your mistake. Listen Bali! A man who takes refuge in Lord Vishnu and surrenders himself to his will becomes liberated from all the miseries and sorrows of life. A man who has accepted Lord Vishnu as his master need not fear from anything not even death. All the things which are visible in this universe are the various manifestations of Lord Vishnu himself. A devotee of Lord Vishnu does not have to go to hell and he becomes liberated from the cycles of birth and death." This way, Prahlada described about the greatness of Lord Vishnu and his worship in great detail.

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BALI'S QUERIES TO PRAHLADA

Bali enquired about the virtues which a man attains by the worship of Lord Vishnu. He also asked Prahlada about the worship and its rituals by

which Lord Vishnu is pleased. Prahlada says-"Sages believe that the donations which are made with total devotion and in the name of Lord Vishnu exist forever. Lord Vishnu is extremely pleased if Malati, Shatavari, Champa, Juhi and Nagar flowers are offered to him. He is also pleased when the offerings of Bilva patra, Shami patra, Tamal and Amali patra are made to him. He is pleased when sesame seeds are donated during the Hindu month of Magh. A person who gets a Vishnu temple constructed liberates his ancestors from their sins. Bali, you must get the Vishnu temple constructed and worship with complete devotion. You must try to please Lord Vishnu by making donations of cow, jewels, gold and land. If you engage yourself in such virtuous activities then you will certainly attain benediction." After saying this, Prahlada disappeared.

After Prahlada's departure, Bali followed his instructions faithfully and engaged himself in the worship of Lord Vishnu. He instructed Vishwakarma to construct a magnificent temple of Lord Vishnu and started worshipping Lord Vishnu accompanied by his wife. He used to clean the temple premises and offer the articles which were dear to Lord Vishnu. This way, Bali and his wife Vindhyavali engaged themselves in the worship of Lord Vishnu with complete devotion.

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BENEFITS OF STUDYING VAMANA PURANA

Study of Vamana Purana helps a man to enhance his knowledge and makes him free from all kinds of worldly attachments. It also increases

his love and devotion towards the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu. There are ten characteristics evident in all the Puranas- 1) Sarg. 2)Visarg. 3) Sthan. 4) Poshan. 5) Uti. 6) Vritti. 7) Raksha. 8) Manvantara. 9) Vansh. 10)Upashraya.

Sarg deals with the descriptions of the origin of this universe. Visarg enlightens us as to how a living thing transforms itself from one species to another. Sthan, Poshan, Uti and Vritti deal with the descriptions of various means which are employed by a man for his survival. Raksha describes about the various incarnations of Lord Vishnu which he takes for the protection of the humankind. Manvantara deals with the complete description of the history of the whole Manvantara period. Vansh describe about the lineage of all the kings including Lord Brahma. Upashraya enlightens us on the real meaning of Brahma.

Pulastya says- "A man who listens to the divine tales of Vamana Purana attains to Vishnu loka after becoming free from all his sins. He attains the same virtues which a performer of Ashwamedha Yagya does. Even listening to one part of Vamana Purana bestows great virtues and equivalent to making pilgrimage of numerous sacred places. Narada, Vamana Purana is the 14th among all the 18 Puranas which describes about the majesty of Lord Vishnu."

Five names of Lord Vishnu have been mentioned in Vamana Purana- Karan Vamana, Narayan, Amitvikrama, Shargang chakra and Purushaottam. A devotee who chants any of these sacred names of Lord Vishnu and makes salutation either by speech, thought or deed attains to Vishnu loka.

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VAMANA INCARNATION

INDRA DOES PENANCE TO ATONE FOR HIS SINS

Pulastya says after being defeated by the demons Indra went to Brahma loka and narrated his woeful tale to him. Sage Kashyapa- his father was also present there. Lord Brahma told Indra that he was reaping the fruits of his evil deeds. Sage Kashyapa told him that his miseries were due to the sin acquired by the destruction of Diti's foetus. Indra asked both of them, how his sins could be atoned. Lord Brahma advised him to take Sri Hari's help.

Indra then went to the north of Kalinjar Mountain and started living in a hermitage situated on the bank of river Mahanadi. He did penance for one year. Pleased by his devotion, Lord Vishnu appeared and blessed him saying- "Your austere penance has liberated you from the sin of destroying Diti's foetus and very soon, you will regain your kingdom." After receiving the blessing, Indra went to Aditi's hermitage and narrated the tale of his defeat at the hands of demons. Aditi knew that Indra would not have been defeated had Lord Vishnu been on his side during the battle. So, she went to Lord Vishnu and worshipped him with devotion. Lord Vishnu assured her that very soon, he would incarnate as her son and destroy the demons. Having said this, a part of Lord Vishnu's effulgence entered into Aditi's womb.

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BALI ABUSES LORD VISHNU

After Lord Vishnu had established himself inside Aditi's womb, the demons became devoid of their radiance. Bali was surprised by this

sudden development and asked Prahlada about it. Prahlada went into deep meditation and saw Lord Vishnu manifesting in Aditi's womb. After coming out from his meditative trance, he told Bali that the demons had lost their radiance due to Sri Hari who is about to take incarnation at the request of the deities.

The arrogant Bali made fun of Sri Hari by saying- "Who is this Sri Hari? We have many mighty warriors in our ranks who are more powerful than Vasudev." Prahlada was a devotee of Sri Hari and he did not like the arrogant utterances of Bali. He cursed him by saying that very soon he would meet his downfall and lose his kingdom. After being cursed, Bali realised his mistake and begged for forgiveness. Prahlada too had calmed down by that time and said- "Even though Lord Vishnu is omnipresent, I cursed you being under the influence of my ignorance. My words will certainly become true but don't lose heart. Go and take refuge in Sri Hari- the supreme protector. He will liberate you from all your sorrows." After saying this, Prahlada went on his pilgrimage.

BALI ABUSES LORD VISHNU

After Lord Vishnu had established himself inside Aditi's womb, the demons became devoid of their radiance. Bali was surprised by this sudden development and asked Prahlada about it. Prahlada went into deep meditation and saw Lord Vishnu manifesting in Aditi's womb. After coming out from his meditative trance, he told Bali that the demons had lost their radiance due to Sri Hari who is about to take incarnation at the request of the deities.

The arrogant Bali made fun of Sri Hari by saying- "Who is this Sri Hari? We have many mighty warriors in our ranks who are more powerful than Vasudev." Prahlada was a devotee of Sri Hari and he did not like the arrogant utterances of Bali. He cursed him by saying that very soon he would meet his downfall and lose his kingdom. After being cursed, Bali realised his mistake and begged for forgiveness. Prahlada too had calmed down by that time and said- "Even though Lord Vishnu is omnipresent, I cursed you being under the influence of my ignorance. My words will certainly become true but don't lose heart. Go and take refuge in Sri Hari- the supreme protector. He will liberate you from all your sorrows." After saying this, Prahlada went on his pilgrimage.

THE DEITIES RESTING DAYS

Lord Vishnu takes rest on Sheshnag during the whole period of Uttarayan, which begins just after the last day of the bright lunar phase in

the Hindu month of Ashadh is over. After he goes to sleep, all the deities, Gandharva, Devamata etc. follow suit.

Narada requested Sage Pulastya to shed light on the days when the deities take rest. Sage Pulastya replied- "A devotee should consider the eleventh day of the Hindu month of Ashadh Shukla Paksha, when the Sun enters the zodiac of Gemini as the day when Lord Vishnu goes to rest. A devotee should make a replica of Sheshnag and after worshipping the idol of Lord Vishnu, lay him down to rest on the twelfth day. Kamadev is said to take rest on the thirteenth day on his bed made of Kadamb flowers. The Yakshaganas take rest on the fourteenth day of the Hindu month of Ashadh Shukla Paksha. Their beds are made of yellow lotus. Lord Shiva is believed to take rest on Purnima. His bed is made of tiger skin.